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# INDIAN WRITERS IN CONFERENCE







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# INDIAN WRITERS IN CONFERENCE

The Sixth P.E.N. All-India  
Writers' Conference

MYSORE · 1962

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*Edited by NISSIM EZEKIEL*



BOMBAY · 1964

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THE P.E.N. ALL-INDIA CENTRE

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## PREFACE

THE SIXTH P.E.N. ALL-INDIA WRITERS' CONFERENCE was held at Mysore in August 1962 at the invitation of the University of Mysore. The Conference was inaugurated by the President of India, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, who is also President of the P.E.N. All-India Centre. Several of our most distinguished Members were present, among them H.H. the Maharajah of Mysore, Sri Jayachamaraja Wadiyar Bahadur, Dr. Humayun Kabir, Dr. C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar and Shri Masti Venkatesha Iyengar.

Four symposia were held during the four days of the Conference: *How Contemporary Writers See India*; *Ideas and Modern Poetry*; *Humour in Modern Indian Literatures*; *East-West Dialogue*.

There are not many publications which bring together competent critical surveys on parallel topics in many Indian literatures. To make one such collection available is our aim in publishing this Volume. And we are sure this will be a most useful compilation.

SOPHIA WADIA

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Madame Sophia Wadia, Founder Organiser of the PEN All-India Centre, for giving me the opportunity to edit this publication. Also, for her unfailing courtesy, patience and understanding while it was being seen through the press.

Mr Rameshchandra Sirkar of *The Aryan Path* helped me in designing the book and in selecting the types. His advice was invaluable and his enthusiasm contagious.

Credit for the cover must be given to Mr Devidas Gavaskar, who worked on it by kind permission of *Imprint* magazine.

Miss S. Balsara and Miss Iqbal Bakhtiyar of the PEN, charming ladies both, assisted me in various ways.

The paper writers promptly replied to my queries and trusted me with the proofs.

Mr S. R. Krishnan and Mr P. A. Raman of INLAND PRINTERS were friendly and co-operative.

My thanks to all of them.

NISSIM EZEKIEL



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# INAUGURAL ADDRESS

By Dr. S. RADHAKRISHNAN

*President of India*

I AM happy to be here and to say a few words to you.

I am sorry that the Prime Minister is unable to be present with us on account of his other pressing engagements. We miss him a great deal for he is a writer of eminence who has made a great impact on contemporary society. His leadership of the present silent, bloodless revolution in our country is an inescapable influence.

In this revolution which is felt in every phase of our life, the writers' role is important. By their shining phrases, memorable utterances, by their living words, (*rasātmakam vākyaṃ*,) they change men's minds. Writers of such quality are the conscience of the community. They express the tension between the past and the future, between the dream and the fact. They are not only the products of the past and possessors of the present but are the creators of the future. They have in them the imaginative quality, the dreaming temper which transcends the fact as it is and holds up the vision of what the fact should be. The transcendent in them makes them love truth and mercy and abhor wickedness and violence.

The themes selected for discussion include *The Writer and Contemporary India* and *East-West Dialogue*. Whatever I may say will have a little relevance to these topics.

The point about Contemporary India is that unlike Contemporary Egypt and Contemporary Greece which, though inhabiting more or less the same geographical areas, are quite distinct from the civilizations of ancient Egypt and Greece, India not only occupies almost the same geographical area but is continuous with the past and bears allegiance to the same values which ancient India developed. It has endured because it has received alien influences which it adapted to its own traditional framework. When we read

our great writers, we listen to the same heart-beats, the same universal ideals which we are struggling to embody in our social life. Our leaders among whom are the writers are oppressed by the alien quality of the disjointed factual order.

We claim a spiritual inheritance that reaches back many centuries but it is in conflict with the obvious facts of our life. We cannot reconcile with our spiritual orientation, the religious tensions which are ready to break out into mob violence, the group antagonisms based on caste or language which sometimes lead to rioting and bloodshed. The pain and degradation of untouchability, the acceptance of social ills, the practical worship of evil, outrage our humanity and yet we acquiesce in them. In 1947 when freedom was achieved our country was torn and bleeding. What happened then is a blot on our good name.

All this is due to our straying away from the spirit of our culture, its distortion, if not its falsification.

The way of religion is the remaking of man, a complete reversal of the ordinary self-seeking attitude of mind towards our fellowmen and nature. It is the integrating of the human individual. This produces an entirely new set of values. When this happens the infinite is revealed in the finite. The whole creation with eager longing waits for this revelation. It is the promised land.

Religion is a way of life, which has for its end a profound spiritual transformation. Religion is not a theory or a sentiment but it is a vital experience; the result of an assiduous practice in inward purification. We should not mistake the means for the end.

The Divine truth is revealed through human media, through their imagination, intelligence and will; *hrdā manīsā manasā*. Quarrels of superior and inferior, become subordinate. This is the view of ancient India as well as of ancient Greece.

There are movements towards Christian Union, Islamic Union, etc. It is time that we think of a union of all believers, which is the essential basis for *loka-samgraha* or world solidarity. At a time when nations refuse to share their scientific knowledge and through sheer intransigence threaten the whole of humanity with disaster, the peoples

of the world may seek to find unity at the spiritual level. In January 1962 a remarkable meeting took place in Rome under the Presidentship of Cardinal Bea, appointed head of the Secretariat of Christian Unity by Pope John XXIII. The representatives included Catholics, orthodox Christians, Jews, Moslems and members of several other creeds. In the course of his welcoming speech the Cardinal said that those present were united by a deep faith in one God, the creator of the Universe, ruler of all nations and inspirer of all that is true, good and beautiful. If we have a wide open heart, the hearts of others are open to us. This great reaching out to others is not an act of diplomacy but the result of an inner conviction that we are all the children of one God. Asoka, Harsha, Akbar were moved by this deep conviction which underlies the spirit of our Constitution. Truth alone prevails. *Satyam eva Jayate*. Asoka's words *samavāya eva sādhuḥ* are valid for all time.

The word secularism does not occur in our Constitution though it is used to symbolise the spirit of our Constitution in regard to religion. We permit every one to profess, practise and propagate his views so long as his conduct does not interfere with the equal liberty of others to do the same, does not undermine social order or offend moral sense. What is called secularism does not mean irreligion or atheism. It is a recognition that each one should be allowed to seek his way to fulfilment as he chooses. This is recognised in theory but we should establish it in practice if we are to get rid of communal conflicts.

Democracy is based on the faith in the dignity and value of the individual. The Divine is in man; the ray of the celestial light is in each one of us. The four great sayings, the *mahāvākyas* taken from the four Vedas emphasise the Divine in man:

*prajnānam brahma* — The Conscious Intelligence is Brahman.

*aham brahmāsmi* — I am Brahman.

*tat tvam asi* — That art Thou.

*ayam ātmā brahma* — This self is Brahman.

They emphasise the indwelling of the Divine in us, which is behind the apparatus of body, mind, heart, imagination



and intellect. It is this that impels us to move forward and reach complete fulfilment.

The spirit of *dharma* is love. It requires us to be compassionate, to be forgiving, to forbear judgment. The great ones, the seers, saints and prophets, are those who are courageous, confident and sometimes in tears and still serve their fellowmen irrespective of their caste, community or nation. They are universal men who are interested in the welfare of all beings — *loka-kalyāna*. They share in the joys and sorrows of others as if they were their own. This is to love thy neighbour as thyself.

If religious people indulge in practices which are sometimes inhuman, repugnant to our ethical sense, if they sanctify intolerance and hatred, it is because they are religious only in name. They are content with metaphysical subtleties, academic abstractions, dogmatic conformity, ceremonial piety and group loyalties. The way in which we profess to be religious hides from us the face of the Divine. It is mechanical, soulless and sectarian. The man of intellectual knowledge, *mantrāvit*, is not the man of self-realisation, *ātmavit*. The latter realises the unity of all beings in God. If we do not treat human beings with respect and dignity, if we show ourselves to be lacking in sensibility and feeling and believe that we are pleasing God thereby, we degrade not only ourselves but even God.

The divisions of caste and community are exploited because millions suffer from unemployment and some from underemployment. If the economic level is raised, the exploitation of these separatist feelings will diminish. We must strive to build a higher form of social existence. The process of building a nation out of diverse elements is an endless one. We should carry on with this endeavour and not allow worries, tumult, incoherence and selfishness to take hold of us. Religious people will work for the removal of inequalities, economic, social and religious. To this creative process, the writers can make a significant contribution.

## VALEDICTORY SPEECH

By H.H. Sri JAYA CHAMARAJA WADIYAR BAHADUR,

G.C.B., G.C.S.

*Governor of Mysore, on 6th Aug. 1962*

**T**HE HONOUR of addressing this Conference has come to me as a sort of unearned increment, and my acceptance of it has been totally without any pretension on my part of being a man of letters. As a reader of books and a seeker of self-improvement in the company of thinkers and writers I am very grateful for the opportunity of participating in these proceedings.

It is a matter of great happiness to the City and Citizens of Mysore that the P.E.N. has chosen to hold this session here with the blessings and the personal participation of such a personage of international eminence in Philosophy and Literature as the President of India. I am sure that with his guidance and inspiration the organization will be strengthened further in its mission of service in the cause of literature, culture and world fellowship.

In these brief valedictory remarks I shall take the liberty of raising a few questions relating to life and letters at the present day and inviting attention to them by the distinguished members of the P.E.N. Conference. I am sure you have already been thinking of them but some more consideration would be welcome. The questions that I would like to submit on this occasion are:

Do we have too many books?

Are we paying sufficient attention to the Old Masters?

Is the gift of laughter and humour declining?

How far should writings have an ethical purpose?

What special functions have writings and writers to fulfil in the present age?

1. It cannot be denied that at the present day books, like other commodities, tend to be produced on a large scale. If this is taken together with the preoccupations of modern

life there would seem to be the danger of only a smaller and smaller proportion of men taking advantage of an ever-increasing number of books and benefitting by them. Two hundred years ago Goldsmith uttered the warning that "as writers become more numerous it is natural for readers to become more indolent". This is hardly good for civilization. It is the business of literature, as Pope said,

To wake the soul by tender strokes of art,  
To raise the genius, and to mend the heart.

For this purpose the appeal of books should be as widespread as possible, but their very number may work against this desirable end. Has the time come, therefore, for us to think of methods of what may be called Library Limitation? Ruskin divided books into two classes: the books of the hour and the books of all time. Preoccupation with contemporary events is quite natural, but the task of portraying them belongs rightly to newspapers and periodicals, and it would be perhaps an advantage if there were fewer books of an ephemeral character. The problem is by no means new. Over a century ago Carlyle longed for some method by which authors could be paid for the books they did *not* write. Even if writing is "partly a trade and partly an art" there is no doubt that the latter element predominates and ought to predominate. The art of literature should not be confounded with the handicraft of making books.

2. My second question implies the hope that in our attempts to develop modern literature in our own various languages we should keep undiminished our interest in the immortals of the past. It would be good to be assured that we shall never cease to draw inspiration in full measure from Kalidasa and Shakespeare, for instance, and their imagination and taste, their verisimilitude, their artistic excellence and their knowledge of human nature. Without going into any comparison of the merits of the past and the present, it should be clear to us that the production of new wealth is no reason for renouncing even in part, the legacy of the past. Admiration for T. S. Eliot cannot excuse total



ignorance of Milton, any more than reverence for modern leaders can justify ignorance of the teachings of the Buddha or of Jesus.

3. My third question includes a plea for wit and humour in literature. It has been said that the faculty of laughter distinguishes man from the other animals. Humour must always have a place in literature just as laughter must always be a part of life. Humour in proper proportion and in due season is the spice of literature as of life. It is specially valuable in a democratic age in which widespread honest laughter could be a cure for so many ills. Dullness is neither a virtue nor a duty. In the hands of the literary artist humour could also be a powerful instrument of reform as Cervantes and Addison showed.

Literature has many purposes, and ethical teaching is one of them. I am submitting that perhaps a little extra attention to this aspect would be of benefit in this age of strident materialism and matter-of-fact science. A gifted writer can do a great deal of good in this direction, and earn distinction in a profession that is among the noblest.

In partial answer to my last question I would urge that men of letters and their writings should in the present age devote themselves to the purpose of promoting world fellowship and harmony and goodwill among all nations and races. The greatest need in this atomic age is that of the integration of mankind through tolerance, friendship and brotherly love. Literature is an incomparable vehicle for the spread of this doctrine of human unity. It would be a very great thing if all men and women connected with the profession of letters all over the world were to band themselves as missionaries in the cause of peace, international amity and world unity.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish the P.E.N. every success and prosperity in the years to come. I thank you all for your kindness in having asked me to address you today and for your courtesy in listening to these random remarks of mine.

## WELCOME SPEECH

By Professor N. A. NIKAM, M.A. (Cantab)

*Vice-Chancellor, University of Mysore*

**I**N WELCOMING this distinguished gathering, I may speak a little Philosophy. The President, Dr. Radhakrishnan, says somewhere in his writings that centuries of life make a little history and centuries of history a little tradition. I welcome you to Mysore, a place which has centuries of tradition.

In our culture, the beginnings of history are discoverable in the beginninglessness of our mythologies. Mythology does not speak of the merely imaginary, or the far-off, or the unattainable, as it seems to do. On the contrary, a Mythology conveys, through the pleasing deception, that what is yet to be attained and fulfilled in the spiritual history of man, has already been fulfilled, has already happened in the living past. The name "Mysore", a place to which I welcome you, has its history in its Mythology. Mysore is the place where Mahisā-sura, a buffalo-headed demon lived; he defeated all the gods, *devān sarvān parājitya* (says the Purāna). He became Lord of the World, even as brute force lords over our civilization in the contemporary world. Then, in that crisis of the dethronement of the gods, there was born from Divine Reality — Divine Reality which is Universal Light and Power — the goddess who slew the demon, Mahisā-sura. Says the Devi Bhāgavata: *sarveśām tejasā, devī jāta, mahisa-mardhini*: "From the Universal Light and Power was born the slayer or *mahisā*". Shakespeare asked, what is there in a name? You all can see what there is in the name "Mysore" — a philosophy and a tradition.

The *Mahisā-sura* legend conveys the prophetic destiny of man and of humanity: the ultimate triumph of the spiritual in man over the brute that is in him through his awakened intelligence and moral virtue. Our Mythology gives the historical assurance, which is the living faith of

Indian Culture, that something different from brute-force and more powerful than it, will be born to hold in check and even destroy, the ascendancy of blind force in human civilization. The Divine force acts especially when every thing seems to go wrong. The goddess called, *Mahisā-sura Mardhini*, the slayer of the Demon, *Mahisā-sura*, who is the protecting Deity of Mysore, is near us, here, at Mysore, having her exalted abode on yonder hill. The Chāmundi Hill symbolises the history and tradition of Mysore, the life and faith of its people, for centuries and centuries.

Here, therefore, Ladies and Gentlemen, at Mysore, where Myth and History meet, where the vision that the awakened intelligence and soul-force of man will triumph over the ignorant and the animal in him has been seen, there has been flowing from forgotten time a stream of activity in creative excellence: in Literature, Philosophy, Art and Music: in which, the royal family and the people of Mysore have been examples to each other. It is not my intention, however, to take your time in citing the works of the successive Rulers of Mysore but to draw your attention to three unique Treatises:

**SRI TATTVA NIDHI:** This great work is an encyclopaedia of Tri-coloured pictures belonging to the Chitrakāra School of Fine Art. The paintings include the *Rāgamālīka*, i.e., the garland of 36 basic *ragas* in tri-coloured pictures and the *Tāla* Paintings with relevant *Slokas*. There are 32 different poses of Lord Ganesha, and the poses of other gods and goddesses with *Dhyānaslokas* in tri-coloured pictures. The days of the week, month, *āyana* (equinoxes) and the *swarupas* and *dhyanaslokas* of the Hindu cycle of sixty years, and the *Ritus* (Indian Seasons) are also depicted in tri-coloured paintings with *Dhyānas* and *Swarupās*. This extraordinary and encyclopaedic Treatise was prepared in 1850 A.D. by Sri Mummadi Krishna Raja Wadiyar, great grand-father of His Highness Sri Chamaraja Wadiyar.

**SANKHYA RATNAMALA:** This is an encyclopaedia, of another sort, where subjects are arranged in the order of numbers. For example, Pancha-Pandavas, Pancha-rathas, Panch-kosas,



Pancha-mukha, etc., come under the number five. Dasa-mukha Dasadik, Dasanga, come under number ten. The number goes upto 120. Secular sciences like Botany, Ayurveda, Aswavidya, Gajavidya, Music, Dance, are treated in the *Sankhya Ratnamala*. This was also prepared by Sri Mummadi Krishna Raja Wadiyar.

ABHILASITHARTHA-CHINTAMANI: OR RAJA-MANASOLIASA: This is said to contain "all Desirable Knowledge". It is an encyclopaedia treating of various topics, like religious ethics, social service, manufacture of idols, diseases and their remedies, the king, his ministers, architecture, picture-drawing and painting, preparation of calendars, astrology, omens, palmistry, training of horses and elephants together with the treatment of their diseases, mining, alchemy, gems and precious stones, and so on. The author is Chalukya Somadeva of Kalyana and the book was completed on Friday, 22nd March, 1129, A.D. This book gives a detailed description of the game called Polo.

SHIVATATTVA-RATNAKARA: This is an encyclopaedia which is the essence of all arts and sciences treated in the *Vedas* and *Agamas*. Among its contents are the psychoanalysis of dreams and their results. These volumes are a unique possession of Mysore and its rich cultural heritage.

Now, coming to the galaxy of Writers in the History of Kannada Language and Literature, it is not possible for me to cite the names and the works of our literary immortals, but I shall merely indicate two styles of literary immortality by which they are known.

One type of literary immortal in the Kannada Language and Literature is known by the phonetic plenitude of their full names: *Chikkupadhyaya*, *Kalale Nanjaraja*, *Kundala Gurki Chandra Kavi*, *Kirthana-Kesari*, *Shivamurthy Shastry*, *Siddhavanalli Krishna Sharma*, and so on. The literary immortals of the other style are known by their initials or by short names: for instance: *Masti*, *D.V.G.*, *Ku-Vem-Pu*, *Ta-ra-Su*, *Vi-Ci*, *Ti-nam-Sri*, *Aa-na-Kr*, *D.L.N.*, *J.G.*, and so on. They are all stars of the highest magnitude shining in the empyrean of Kannada Language and Literature. I must

not also forget to mention our budding student-poets and creative writers. I greatly hope that the University Grants Commission will institute Fellowships for young, creative writers, in all languages.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please permit me to claim that Mysore, to which I welcome you, has the magical power of being a launching-ground of future greatness. Our beloved President, Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan was Professor of Philosophy here, in this University. At that time, it would have been an illusion to foresee him as the President of an Independent India; today, the historical reality that he was a Professor at Mysore seems so much like an illusion! Sir, may I describe the quality of your greatness by a sentence from the *Chāndogya Upanisad*?

*Satam vijñānavatām ekō balavan acampayate*, says the *Chāndogya*: "One man of strength causes a hundred learned men to tremble." Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan has the "strength" to make a hundred "learned men" tremble; but he is the President of India to whom people go without the fear that they have to "tremble" before him!

In contemporary India, we see the phenomenon that the stalwarts in the political and public life of our country are all writers. Gandhiji set the best example in this direction. He carried on a "dialogue" with the nation through his writings, educated and prepared the country for the struggle towards freedom. Former President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad and President, Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan are illustrious examples of writers who have risen to occupy the highest post in the public life of the country. The Prime Minister, whom we miss very much in this session, was described by Dr. Radhakrishnan as a writer who had strayed into politics. The late Sarojini Naidu, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Purushottam Das Tandon, and among living leaders, C. Rajagopalachari, Acharya Vinoba Bhave, C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer, K. M. Munshi, Zakir Hussain, and Humayun Kabir, are examples of outstanding writers who are also leaders in the political and public life of our country.

In our country, where it is easy to divide, Madame Sophia Wadia has achieved the difficult and extraordinary thing of

bringing writers and leaders of our public and political life together in the conferences of the P.E.N. Organisation.

It is, therefore, an honour to the Mysore University to have the P.E.N. Conference meet under its auspices. On behalf of the Mysore University and on my own behalf, I greet you all, Ladies and Gentlemen, and welcome you to our City.

I have now great pleasure in requesting the President of India to inaugurate the Sixth P.E.N. All-India Writers' Conference.



## IN FRIENDSHIP

*Speech delivered by Mr. Imam Sutarjo, Consul for Indonesia, at the Inaugural meeting of the Conference*

**T**HOUGH I am neither a writer, nor an author, nor a poet I have much pleasure in attending this Conference to show Indonesia's friendly gesture towards art, culture and literate affinity amongst nations and countries.

Indonesia is a young nation still advancing in developing her literature and talents. Literary attainments develop with the growth of social structure, facilities for internal communications and external contact and influence. This structure is more obvious in my country.

If you look at the map of Indonesia you will find that it is an archipelago spreading like an extended chain from West to East. The country comprises of more than three thousand islands, some big land masses, some small, and many hundreds of islands so small enough not to find a place in a world map. In such a geographical situation with difficulties of communication in the past, even internally in the country, different languages in different islands flourished; there were more than 200 languages. Some of them are still living languages, spoken and written in many of the islands like Javanese, Balinese, Sundanese, Achinese, Batak, etc.

As in other countries Indonesian literature developed in waves of periodicities showing similarities in literary merits and characteristics. Such periods broadly speaking may be divided into ancient or historic, colonial or medieval and Republican or modern.

Much of the literature of the ancient days has been lost during the occupational wars of the colonialists and internal feuds. Such of the few as known to be still surviving are yet to be studied. Just before the colonial occupation of the country there were periods of Hindu, Buddhist and

Arabic influences in the western part of the archipelago. Such influences greatly accelerated the development of Indonesian literature. Rajas, Princes and Sultans occupied positions of poet and influence. They encouraged literates and poets by giving them facilities and inducements monetarily and by official recognitions. A large number of writers came up during this period and they usually extolled the activities and prowess of these princes. A special instance of such an encouragement was during the reign of King Hajam Wuruk with the assistance of his well known Prime Minister Gadja Mada. (The University of Gadja Mada at Jokjakarta bears his name today). Famous writers such as mPu Prapantja who wrote the 'Negarakertagama' influenced the literary development of the day. This book has a great historical value, and much referred to, to get authentic information of the period. Another famous writer of the period was mPu Tantular who wrote the 'Pararaton', a history book of Indonesian kings living in that period. He was the originator of the historic words 'Bhinneka Tunggal Ikka' meaning Unity in Diversity. These words have been inscribed in the Indonesian Emblem. The poetic trend of mind in these days can be understood from the poem which I quote below:

"We shall sing the praise of the King who like the sun is  
a ruler victorious over the world

The enemies have been destroyed like darkness and all on  
earth have been defeated

Satisfied are the virtues like waterlilies; the vicious are  
like the Nympheas in truth

Faithfully the villages of the country bring their presents,  
which are offered like water according to duty

Like the God Satamanyu pours rain on the earth, thus  
wards the misery of the subjects

Like Pitrapati he punishes the sinners, he is Waruna  
where treasures are found

Like Wayu penetrating the whole world resorting to  
envoys

Like Pritivi protecting the State in appearance like God  
Condrama

During the Hindu, Buddhist period of influence the old Javanese Sanskrit language was much used.

Then came the colonial occupation of the country. Colonial rule changed the shape of the Indonesian society. Indonesia got another cultural pattern. The literary society now began to move around Djakarta, the capital of Indonesia. Djakarta came to play an important role in the literary activity of the country. Instead of praising the kings and sultans people became more and more self conscious and national minded. The poets and novelists adopted the evolution and national consciousness in their poetic themes and novel plots.

A notable period in the field of Indonesian literature was between the years 1928 and 1945, which may be called the beginning of a modern era. Novels and poetry with a moral tendency came to be appreciated. A number of writers grouped together in the "Pudjangga Baru" and decided to break old traditions and resolved to form new forms of expressions. The best known person and one of the founders of the 'Pudjangga Baru' is Takdir Ali Sjabana, a lawyer, a poet, teacher and essayist. He aimed to raise Indonesia to a worthy place among the nations. The other well known writers during the period are Abdul Muis (a novelist) and IGoesti Njoman Pandji Tisna (a Balinese author). Here is an example of a poem of the period of 'Pudjangga Baru' which will show the hunger for freedom prevailing then:

#### Freedom

"Upon the ruins of the walls I had destroyed  
I sit on my white horse in victory  
Hills and vast valley spread before me  
With the sky bowing low  
Make me hungry of space  
Then my chest gives ample space  
For the heart that beats violently  
Emanating blood that gushes out  
The blood of my horse boils too  
And he jumps up excited  
Then, I let him go  
We run storming out to many a shore."



The development of political conscience in the country, literates also encouraged such conscience and influenced the people in this direction. In the year 1928, the Kongress Indonesia Muda (Young Indonesian Congress) proclaimed the three principles of:

One country	Indonesia
One Nation	Indonesia
One language	Bahasa Indonesia

The Indonesian language was spoken formerly in the island of Sumatra and in the nearby islands. With the passage of time, the language came to be enriched by additions of regional idioms and compositions. The Japanese occupation in a way encouraged the people in the greater usage of Bahasa Indonesia throughout the country and paved the way for a modern and dynamic language.

When Indonesia proclaimed her independence, came a new period in Indonesian literature of what is known as the "1945 Generation". Three poets, Chairul Anwar, Rivai Apin and Asrul Sani are regarded as the pioneers of the "1945 Generation". To divide the history of literature into compartments or periods is not an easy task as changes and progress permeates into the field slowly and by stages. Whether to classify the "1945 Generation" as the beginning of a new period is a problem which is still under study by the Literates of Indonesia.

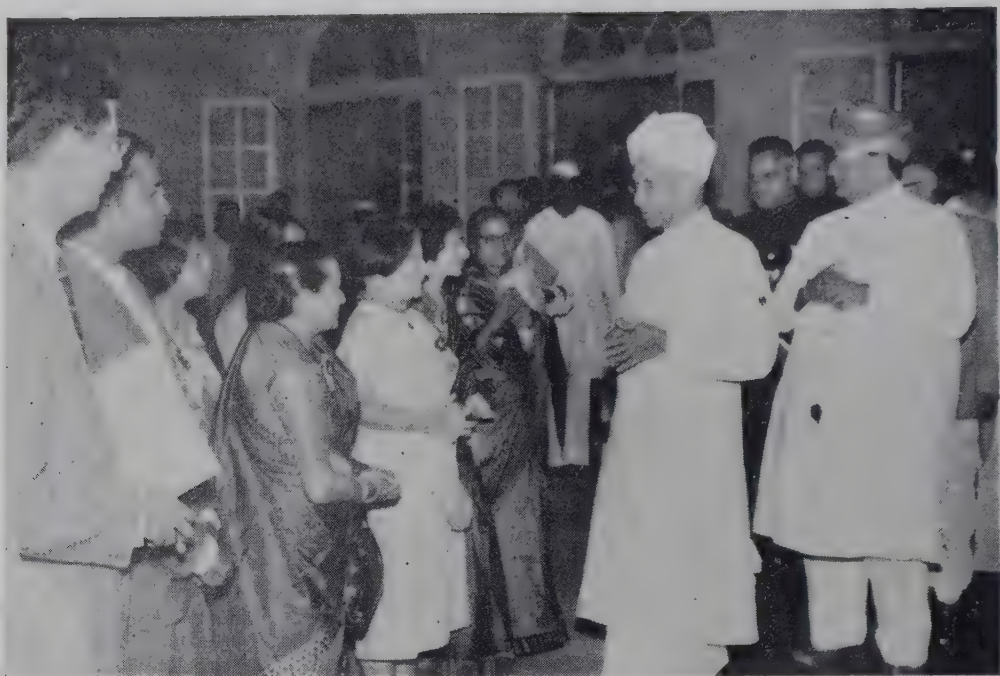
Indonesia is not conservative in the development of her language. For the speedier development of Bahasa Indonesia she has adopted the Roman Script and she is not shy either now or at any time to adopt or take in idioms and phrases of foreign origin for clarity and clearness of expression.

Lastly I may say that a new thinking in the literary field which began with the year 1945 will climax with greater emphasis for the liberation of West Irian from the Dutch, a problem now agitating greatly the minds of the people of Indonesia.



MR. & MRS. J. H. BROWN, PRESIDENT OF THE  
 BOARD, LEFT TO RIGHT: MRS.  
 J. H. BROWN, THE HONORARY CHAIRMAN



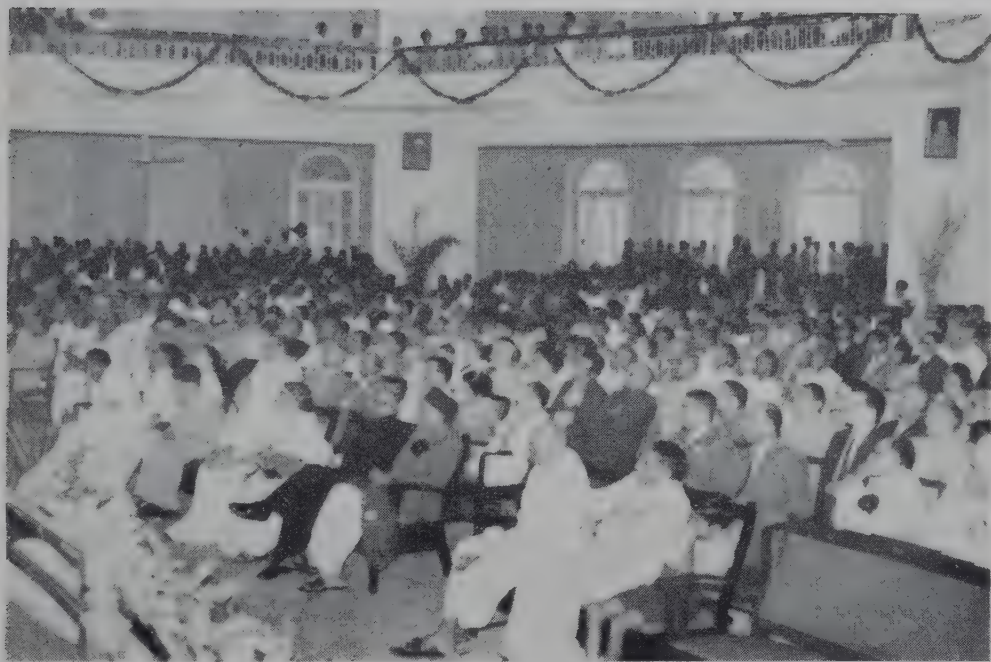


# INFORMAL GROUPS AT THE CONFERENCE

(above) DR. RADHAKRISHNAN AND H.H. SHRI JAYACHAMARAJA WADIYAR MEETING DELEGATES; (below) DELEGATES CONVERSING: L. C. Jain, Masti Venkatesha Iyengar, Prabhakar Machwe and R. K. Narayan.

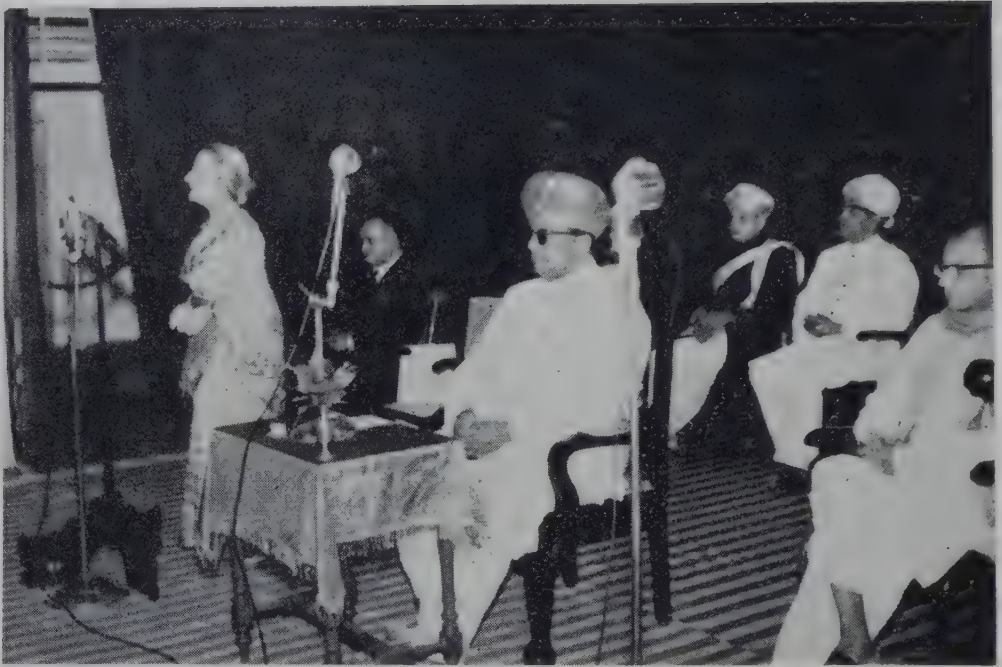






AUDIENCES *(above)* AT THE INAUGURAL SESSION  
*(below)* AT THE VALEDICTORY SESSION





(above) MADAME SOPHIA WADIA INTRODUCING H.H. SHRI  
JAYACHAMARAJA WADIYAR'S VALEDICTORY ADDRESS  
(below) THE CRAWFORD HALL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MYSORE  
where the Conference was inaugurated and given a Reception.





# HOW WRITERS SEE CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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## I V. SITARAMIAH

THE contemporary is roughly one's period of experience and functioning: in my case, these forty years. It comprises, therefore, the two or three generations of writers of the modern period. Writers are at least of three kinds. The first has not been influenced by the West. At best it reinterprets the meaning and value of the past. If any of that set are creative writers they are affected directly or indirectly by the new movement. The second expresses itself in English for a specialised audience here in India or elsewhere. It is oriented towards appreciation and acceptance in England and America. These writers are frankly amused by and contemptuous of Indian opinion and judgement of their work. The third section is what I shall now be concerned with: the writers in the regional languages.

What strikes one in this is that the pattern is uniform and parallel in all India. It has, I fear, ever been that in India. I generalise from my experience in my region, and this note is in the nature of a few observations on performance; a report on findings. The movement in my own language was launched and presided over by schoolmasters and inspecting officers of the Education Department and of the University. Our leaders at the several later stages of the new movement have also been teachers and students of English Literature.

The first phase reflected what is called the Romantic movement of the 19th century in England. To some observers, even the the *Navya* is Spasmodic or Decadent form of it — (with a dash of symbolism and the cult of the Image today). This work began and gained acceptance in the 'Twenties. Later decades have closely patterned themselves on what became fashionable in England. And the English, or the Western if you please, critical attitudes and conflicts



influenced our writers. Only the practice here has a time-lag of ten, twenty or even thirty years. It seems to take that long for young minds to work out a change from the establishment—when contemporary masterpieces elsewhere do not get translated into an Indian language as soon as it appears in the original country: as it seems to have done in Bengal. The interwar period of the Progressives with its touch of radical socialism, if not even Communism, marked our poetry as well; but much more our Fiction. The later *Navya* has its incidence all over in much the same way.

The subject-matter seems to be chosen in almost the same way all over India. A certain unreality, ill-temper, and want of blood feature the new phase. That Indian literature is one though the tongues are different can be as much jibe as cause for comfort.

It is difficult to convey a unitary meaning of the contemporary scene. For it has a parcelled personality. How much of it is Indian and yet modern is hard to tell or define. It is a complex—more cocktail than vintage. What of the writers themselves? The lower economic and social classes do not write; nor are they much written about. The richer and more aristocratic classes are allergic to literary creation; or, cannot. It is the middle class—or what belongs to the liberal professions—that throws up the writers. So that the writing is roughly its view of itself and others. And the work bears the impress of both its strength and its weaknesses. The farmer, the trader, the working classes find much of this work hard to grasp; perhaps unreal as well; the expression and attitudes are sophisticated and the language strange, often unmeaning. They are meant for the canny ones only, though the best of lighter work catches all tastes with lots of cleverness and narrative and descriptive interest to attract and hold. They sometimes are also meant to impress fellow writers only or the critics; and they desire to score for style, structure and technique. Indeed, the pre-occupation with technique is almost obsessive—more than with substance and more than with what should devote itself to the large human condition and the vision of its destiny. The wealth of even a transitional society—if properly seen—is considerable; yet neither its process nor its

direction very much seems to exercise the writers. Some are content to be ignorant or unmindful of it; some are relativist; some mystical; not many are puissant or glad and will not care to be wooed or won. Some touch pitch and are defiled.

Common everyday life did not figure much in our ancient literature. Modern work began to give it a place. Laughter, irony and drive of secular purpose have now gone into it. We have a few good regional novels. But social portrayal has been mainly taken up with some aspects of the relation between the sexes; one or two social evils like drink and domestic tyranny; a few caste and other injustices and hypocrisies. But large studies of the human scene and working out of the implications of a principle, a purpose or attitude could have had better showing. There is focussing on traits of personality and character and situation. But by and large, content is thin; width and variety lacking.

One reason for this may be that the writers are all in the cities and find time to cast just a meagre look only at the surface of things. They lack vital contact with or any intimate knowledge of the different levels and types of men and aspiration; are content to guess at the cause when they cannot base it on study and experience. Depth and undertone need to come in. Professional writers are few and literature does not support the serious writer. Others take up literary work as side-job or hobby. But the main profession of the writer may not find reflection in it or supply inspiration.

Inspiration is the key-word in this context. Many writers do not seem to be tuned to contemporary life; they escape into the epics and other legends. One wonders how much of our poetry, music, painting, dance, etc. even today, would be left if the Krishna-Radha affairs are prohibited as overworked. Some read into the legends the most breathtaking modernism. Does not the best interpretation of the Ramayana, the Bharata or the Puranic episodes still hold us to a past? Their premises in conduct and motivation are not ours . . . Some deal with historical themes beautifully and effectively. Even this too in reality is an escape. In recent times the stress, the strain, the heroism of the national

movement have been portrayed fairly well; though the pattern all over India artistically is again similar. Patriotic feeling has been in articulation; but the best in this kind is denigrated as being inferior, "hired", propagandist, or a "lackey of the ruling cliques". Meanwhile, uniformity and standardisation are being helped by the translation of the same texts in fourteen or fifteen languages sponsored by the Sahitya Akademi and the Akasa Vani Samarohs, etc. That is good as far as it goes, aids a hundred writers and, incidentally, acquaints all regions with the work being done elsewhere. This uniformity is emphasized by the prevalence of it in food, dress habits, the club and hotel, the cinema, the radio and the periodicals. The spur to striking out on one's own is difficult in such an environment. Yet one is intrigued how elsewhere new work comes out with reach, vitality and significance, setting standards of achievement for the world. While with five thousand years of history and culture and exposed to the same winds of change or standardisation we in India are not able to show work which makes the world sit up and take notice of us. It should not be forgotten that standards of comparison today are international and against the perspective of Time. Is this due to any lack of genius? Do we miss our vocations or our "bus"? This is not to speak disparagingly of some quality work that has come or is coming up, but to say that more of better work should have been possible. Or, is the jibe true that we are more receptive, assimilative and eclectic than creative: mothers, than fathers? I do not depreciate and I am not ungrateful to the mother function. I only indicate a deficiency trait.

Somehow the substance of the actual life of our time is not being sensed or presented adequately in our poetry and drama, though fiction has attempted it a little and has scored more than a mild success. The dramatic form has also occasionally yielded some harvest. The social scene is to many writers drab, lacking poetry—as they feel it or are accustomed to recognise it—ugly or vulgar in display and taste. But then, whether their definition of poetry is right is a question that may legitimately be asked. The political scene is really depressing. Our languages do not seem yet to have shaped happily enough to satisfy a classically trained ear or



for catching the exotic outbursts of the modern scene. And this also is true: that many have no mastery of the wealth of the language. With the result that Time marches on before our eyes without our caring so much as to look at it and asking it to abide by our question and portrayal. And there is non-commitment with what the country is trying to do for pulling itself up with its bootstraps, as they call it. Many have no knowledge of it. They cannot or will not travel; cannot believe that any good can happen with the present race of men. The grabbing, the jockeying into positions of power, corruption and nepotism are there hurting the eye and the soul, no doubt. But that is the crude substance of political life everywhere, raw at all times. Where and when was a democracy which was clean, chaste, economical, efficient and always alert? The writer, anyway, shuns contact with what is making or misshaping history.

Sorrow, loss, separation, and frustration seem ever to find a more natural sympathy, a more congenial emotional articulation in the writers than joy, zest, work and achievement. That explains why the active world is not oriented towards them. The economic depression among the middle classes makes this neglect of the writers fateful.

Some expected a heaven to open up with independence, and a rain of milk and honey. That did not happen. The writers are not workers. They can easily forget that cows have to be fed and bees permitted to hive and collect honey before they can be milked or combed. It was no fault of the common men that they did not become heroes or saints overnight. It takes time to grow into manhood even in India. When creative writers do not play ball, the world in its clumsy way does not care to take notice of them; for they themselves do not help or sing or put them on the map. One however wishes that this were itself a subject for composition. But who can prescribe subjects to a poet?

In India, today's scene is a much richer milieu than any other in the new or middle past. Life was far simpler then than now. The scale of everything today is larger. It may not be homogeneous or balance or clean: or simpler to handle. Not all is sweet or pleasant. Much of the past is becoming more or less a relic or dull habit. Old faith has

shrivelled or is disappearing. New secular and social forces are battering down the traditions of the country. Men, institutions, manners, modes of living, aspiration, occupation, movement and transport, reading material, occasions and demands are all undergoing change. A whole society is crumbling before our eyes and is in the throes of a new shaping. If the writer does not take notice of it, the loss is his. Why should it owe anything to him who does not bother about it?

Then again, the sense of society or community in a modern city is laxer than formerly and does not bind or relate one to another intimately. It therefore needs a new interpretation. When opportunities are open to migrate to the city at a pinch, the writers who inveigh against its tyranny can be prisoners of past habits of thought. Family life is disintegrating; the relationship between its members is getting looser. The homes, building shapes, amenities and furnishing do not belong to the life Indian. Each person employed and migrating elsewhere tends to live at more than one linguistic, social and cultural level. There is often no sense of roots and belonging. Nor is life cultivated for continuity. Influences outside the home are many of them exotic. Sights and sounds more alien. The equality between the sexes and the adult suffrage are radical forces which might take at least the rest of this century to work themselves out and be assimilated into or cross-fertilise the blood.

All this is bound to transform the living environment i.e. the framework of life for all. If the writers do not tune themselves to it, or retire into ivory towers—aesthetic or pseudo-spiritual—or be subject to mere ideologies and gusts of passion, they are sure to miss the main throb, the colour and rhythm of life today. Many writers see only meaninglessness, boredom, ugliness and want of coherence in the world before them, or is it because they hear life is described so in Europe and America? Are they looking on in affection and as participants or are they unattached? Or, because they are negative, listless and disconsolate? Theirs is a lonesomeness in a world as full of comedy and tragedy as any other major period of human history. And if their scope and

dimensions are not heeded what is left to hold on to? Is this lonesomeness and boredom presented as theme either?

The time seems to me to be full of promise and possibility. We have today all the resources of mental, moral, aesthetic and judicial analysis, all the experience of the ages in our libraries and all the contemporary ones in our periodicals. But they seem more to overwhelm us than to inspire or exhilarate us. Or, we are moved just to make weak imitations or adaptations of other work or of one another?

Into a quarter of a century this land desires to crowd the achievements of centuries elsewhere. At least as ambition this is daring. All the wealth of this world's know-how is getting into our factories and smithies and our laboratories. While other nations are condemned to only one type of industrial technique, we have access to all. The adventures of technology, energy and science make us gasp. Our soldiers guard some of the world frontiers. Our young men stand unflinchingly firm on the Himalayan heights across 600 miles of snow while enemy bands camp round them 20 yards close. The deserts of Rajaputana overflow with life-giving water and thousands of miles of canals bring sustenance to millions of acres of land. One wonders why the inspiration of none of these gets into our work or rouses enthusiasm. A Bhagiratha, an Indra, a Prometheus or Seigfreid may inspire. A living sight does not; it is brute fact, not emotion recollected in tranquility! Song, dance, drama and thrill could have been there, and inventiveness. Against this is a sterilising theory that the too near in time may condemn the writing to mere chronicling and reportage. Can it not be transformed by genius if the fire and skill! and the living imagination function to embody it?

The spiritual scene is equally unsensed and unheeded. East and West have struck against each other—let us hope in friendly encounter—the next step can be forward only if both are integrated and march together. Neither can score alone. And between the two, both of which have beauty, strength and energy as well as weaknesses and limitation—men are precariously balanced and seem to lack direction. Our Prime Minister once said that he felt spiritually lonesome between two cultures. It is the condition of many intellec-



tuals. I fear we are too long content to be there. There is the lonesomeness of our men and women in the jungles which are our cities, in foreign countries where they go on duty, for study or trade. But no writer of stature seems to have felt impelled to depict it. Only the small fads, whims and impulsions of roving fancy move him. Or, crude fanaticism, the campaigns of hate, partisanship and frivolous merriment are in the wings. If a good look is taken at this desolation—this, if you please, our Waste Land—we would have a mud-bath and get a wholesome exercise.

Writers are earnest men, most of them, talented in their way but subject to moods. A whiff is felt by them like a blight, a stain like a wound. But imaginative enterprise on a scale which will make it creative, heroic and epic in its new kind is waiting to be essayed and accomplished. To moan, to groan, to curse, to hurl defiance at, to hide away in disgust and gorge salads of sentiment, if easier to do is not a man's job. Our time faces us with a challenge; and with the whole of our spirit and full-bloodedly—like the masterspirits of the Epic ages—we should meet it. This is no dictation of theme or method or purpose to writers who are free to do what they will or not to do what they won't, but to notice the things and events we tend to miss: whatever our reason. To present the life of our time as like it in its individuality—whole of it if it can be seen whole, parcelled and incoherent if it be that, yet fundamentally true of all time—is a task of no mean magnitude. This is our age; we know, see and live only in this. We cannot truly live in any other time except as ghosts or fantasists. When so much awaits visioning and doing the writer had better brace up to the call and be its voice and fashioner.

But will the writers agree to see contemporary India?

# HOW WRITERS SEE CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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## 2 GULABDAS BROKER

CONTEMPORARY India seems to be a mixture, a medley of many things. It abounds in contrasts. It moves at once with the speed of a jet-plane and the slowness of a bullock-cart. It has huge metropolitan cities with all the comforts of the industrial West, and a vast number of villages absolutely ignorant of all but the most primitive ways of life. Millions of acres of its land are tilled by the hand-plough, but at the same time thousands of them are ploughed by the latest models of mechanized tractors. It has, for its working inhabitants, both the enervating effect of the scorching sun as well as the efficiency of the air-conditioned office. It suffers with equanimity the handicaps of the frustrating present, and in the same breath harbours sweet dreams of a golden future.

This mixture of disparate elements is visible in many spheres of life of present-day India. The social, moral, political and economic spheres are full of problems created on account of this odd conglomeration.

A major portion of India has still the same sort of society that it has known through its centuries of history; but in the cities, at least, it is changing so fast that it becomes difficult sometimes to reconcile the new mode of life with that India has always known.

One of the principal gifts of India to the concept of Society, so the sociologists say, was its development of the system of living called the joint-family system. Most of rural India follows that system even now. In the India of the cities that system is fast disintegrating, and families of single units are springing up in vast numbers, creating newer problems, demanding ever-new solutions. In most of rural India—and in unsophisticated circles in the cities, too—the old parents still occupy pride of place in the family group,

but in some circles in the highly modernised urban society of today, the problem of aged parents seems to defy an easy solution. One can mention, in this context, the springing up in some cities, due to the efforts of energetic social workers, of homes for old people. In such homes, aged parents, who once adorned the heads of the family table, are dumped for life by their children on the payment of an annual or a monthly fee for their upkeep.

This problem—the problem of the joint or the separate family, or of the place of old people in a family—is not the only one that present-day society in India has to face. The whole, huge social fabric is undergoing such a vast change, and that change is, in its own way, affecting the life of the people to such a great extent, that to treat of it even on its outer fringe, not a paper but a volume would be required. It is sufficient for our purpose here to note that contemporary India provides, at the same time, a structure and design in different areas of the same linguistic or geographic regions.

As with social, so with moral life. India, like any other civilized country, has a well-defined moral code demanding strict adherence. Throughout the centuries, its people have tried to uphold that code. Even now many of its citizens try to act according to that code, and look down with contempt upon any action that deviates from it. But with variations in social organization, the moral norms of today also vary to some extent from those of yore. The norm of behaviour on the moral plane of the new social circles where educated men and women come together on ever-increasing occasions is bound to be different from the strict norms of behaviour of a society wherein men and women moved in separate watertight compartments, as it were. Hence we see in India today the curious spectacle of women mixing with men on very free terms, dancing with them, sharing burdens of responsibility with them, and feeling themselves their equals—if not their superiors in some cases—side by side with women hiding themselves behind their *ghunghat*, or *purdah*, as the case may be, and disappearing from sight at the first signal of a male arrival. Both these aspects obtain simultaneously in the same areas at many



places, and they contribute not a little to the medley that is contemporary life in India.

Politically, India is a vast democracy. All of its adult population can decide its own fate through its own actions. It has conducted vast elections on the basis of adult franchise, and they have achieved a unique success. But, even so, this medley is discerned in the political structure, too. The democratic element has to march side by side with the feudal element, and the intellectually advanced forces cannot ignore the caste-ridden forces that try to stop their onward march at every step. This creates a lot of difficulties, and the eloquent debate about the need for national integration owes not a little to the existence side by side of different levels of political awareness and backwardness.

In the economic field, India is trying to build up a huge, highly modern industrial organization which does not combine very effectively with the almost medieval ways of trading and commerce obtaining in vast tracts of this land.

Along with other perspicacious intellectual elements in India, the writer also sees all those multifarious trends running together in many spheres of life in India. He would not bother much if the running together of these various streams at their different levels, on account of their juxtaposition, serve the purpose only of providing rich basic material to students of the social or other sciences. But he knows that, unfortunately, it does not do only that. He knows, as other people in other fields also do, that these streams have produced deleterious results in almost all spheres of life in contemporary India. Being by nature a very sensitive person he feels very deeply about it. When the creative element within him gets active, that feeling is transferred to his writings. Through that we get a picture of contemporary India as the writer sees it.

It is not a happy picture. It is a picture drawn by a person who has shed his illusions and who is not happy to see the reality which faces him. He is not very wrong either because the reality that springs out of all this conglomeration of forces is, anyway, sad enough. Vulgar exhibition of riches suddenly acquired due to the process of rapid industrialization adopted by the country, indiscriminate sexual

promiscuity made possible by free mixing of men and women in every walk of life, and also by the lessening of the stigma attached to such promiscuous behaviour due to a general decline in religious and moral beliefs, shameless running after political power and resorting to all means, fair or foul, in order to achieve it, get-rich-quick methods adopted on a vast scale by the industrial and trading circles, and resort to all sorts of shady practices to reach that goal—bad enough as all these are, even by themselves, the really offensive point about them is the degree of apparent respect which these elements seem to extract from society, the freedom from shame with which they move in it, getting recognition instead of punishment. The richer classes can, of course, afford to behave as they like because there is none to question them. The poorer ones hardly care for public opinion because they have nothing to lose. It is only the middle classes who suffer, because they can neither afford to behave as they like without being questioned, nor not to care. The world is too much with them and they are crushed between the worlds of wanton display and of vulgar turpitude.

Mostly the writer belongs to the middle classes, and he looks on with dismay at this world around him. Along with others who cannot have the resources for an easy, a happy-go-lucky life, and who, due to their upbringing, have not the temperament for it, he too suffers from a feeling of frustration due to all these factors. Being gifted by nature to give a form to his feeling, he creates a world wherein the absurdity of the whole scene spread out on the canvas of contemporary life becomes immediately apparent. Being a depiction of the absurd, the world that he creates is not a realistic world which his forebears revelled in painting. It has exaggerated overtones and excessive emphasis. It is a new thing, a thing which was perhaps never done before his time. The writer of yore could afford to air a happy vision, and he tried to transmit it through the creation of an idealistic world. In the time of the writer who just preceded the writer of the present day, much of this idealistic view had evaporated under the icy stare of cruel reality. The writer tried to depict that reality in a realistic manner,



hoping inwardly, perhaps, to somehow or the other be able to change it through that kind of depiction.

The present-day writer has neither an idealistic nor a realistic illusion. To him the world has become a strange phenomenon which he hardly understands. Men have become strangers to each other, even to themselves. That is, in fact, why a Hindi writer chooses such a theme for his novel, and a Marathi writer writes a short story about a stricken dog moving around in never ending circles, and a Gujarati poet, who on an earlier occasion had proclaimed his desire to cease to be an individual and become a cosmic being, a *Viswa Manavi*, now announces with anguish that he is torn to pieces, that he is "*chinna-bhinna*", that he smells corpses everywhere.

This anguish of the human heart depicted in so many different ways by so many different poets, novelists and short story writers, in all the languages of India—I have knowledge of only a very few of them, but I know that this thing is happening all over India with a darker shade here and a lighter there—seems to be the keynote of the literature of contemporary India. That literature is not always as successful as it could be. It is at times morbid, at times obscure, at times oversentimental, at times only seemingly clever. Many times this anguish, this attempt at delineating the absurd, seems more borrowed than felt. Depicting a borrowed feeling which is not imaginatively experienced in the very marrow of the bones, in the rhythmic flowing of the blood-stream is, perhaps, the greatest enemy of success in creative writing. Such borrowed conceptions, howsoever richly endowed with all the appurtenances of the writer's craft like symbols, images, myths and style, are sure to fail to attain great heights in creation.

This borrowing, this imitation, this trying to appear what in reality one is not, is also a part of the scene in India today. The aping of the West in the life of the cities is apparent in every drawing room, every air-conditioned hotel, every fashionable promenade, every renowned shopping centre. The writer, too, is a living organism in this contemporary scene, and he too consciously or unconsciously apes things coming from the West, though conditions obtaining there



are many times quite different from those obtaining in his own country. Thus budding poets try to be smaller Rilkes and beginners in the art of fiction try to out-Kafka Kafka by stretching the fantastic to absurd lengths. Camus, Sartre and existentialism have become household words and Beckett and Ionesco have become symbols of the attainment worthy in literary art. The morbid world of Tennessee Williams and the overtones of Arthur Miller are clasped to the heart, though the supreme craft of all these masters is hardly in evidence in the creations inspired by their examples.

And thus it is that in the contemporary literary scene in India, experiment seems to abound more than achievement, and the glittering imitation article is something dangled before the public as perhaps more valuable than solid original stuff.

But the roots for this state lie in the new rootless life in the cities where the happy-go-lucky and the go-getter seem to thrive at the expense of the sincere and the sound.

The sincere and the sound have had their full innings in pre-independence days in India. In those days a free and Independent India loomed large on the horizon as a dream, a vision, a Promised Land. There would be no more misery then, no more want. The evil that there was was due to the presence of the ruling foreigner. The day he was sailing on the deep seas out of India, milk and honey would begin to flow in this happy land.

That day, too, came, but instead of bringing milk and honey it brought murder, massacre, rape. It left a bitter taste in the mouth, but people waited. Plenty would come, now that we are masters in our own land, they thought. It did come, but it came only to a few who made such a wicked exhibition of it and such an evil use of it, that the dream vanished, the vision disappeared, and the Promised Land became, in the eyes of the sensitive at least, a land of broken promises. Frustration resulted. Eyes were blurred and tempers frayed. In that mood, the writer in India forgot to write about the romantic aspect of things, but become bitter and satirical. Instead of talking about the happiness of the human heart, he began to delve deep into the innate recesses of the individual psyche and tried fearlessly to

portray what he saw there. He did not get enamoured—he still is not enamoured—of the great romance of building up a new India that its chosen rulers had undertaken. He saw there corruption, inefficiency, imbalance, indecision and unfulfilment. The results, he thought, were not commensurate with the efforts put in and the sacrifices demanded of the people. He refused to talk about it, to look at it with any creative impulse. He wove about him an inner world of his own and began to give creative form to that world only.

Naturally, this refusal cannot be understood or appreciated by persons who are actually making the romantic experiment of creating a new India. Hence the hiatus, the sort of divorce that is apparent between the administrator and the writer. In this connection, I remember an interesting incident. It took place in Saurashtra some years ago. There at a party a minister and a writer were conversing. The minister was full of enthusiasm about a scheme he and his colleagues were trying to see through, and he was wondering why the writers instead of being enthused by it were actually apathetic towards it. "Why do you writers not write about all these fine things we are doing?" he asked.

The scheme was about making the arid Saurashtra region lying between Rajkot and Bhavnagar turn itself, so to say, into a lovely garden. The writer said: "Let it turn itself into a garden first. Then, if I have a heart to feel and a voice to sing, I shall certainly sing full-throated songs to a thing which is yet to be born, which in fact," he added bitterly, "may not be at all".

That was some eight years ago. That region between Rajkot and Bhavnagar is still as arid as it then was.

This then is the contemporary scene in India and that is how the writer sees it. As we stated earlier, India is a mixture, a medley of many things today. The writer's world is no exception. Side by side with the depiction of frustration and the utterance of bitterness, quite a considerable volume of goody-goody writing is being done which tries to reflect a serene, a normal, a moral, a no-longer-existing world. In the context of today, that writing by its very nature appears

as devoid of useful meaning as the bullock cart and the hidebound caste-ridden water-tight compartmented society it represents. It does not reflect the glow of life. Without that glow neither life nor literature has any meaning.



# HOW WRITERS SEE CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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## 3 GANGADHAR GADGIL

I do not know with what eyes all our writers look at contemporary India. For one thing, I do not know the languages of many of them; and for another, I cannot, even if I wanted to, hope to read all that they write. But what I have read does indicate that India means many things to the literary mind and that even the same authors look at the country differently at different times.

Sometimes, in a work, India seems to be only a garden in which an attractive young girl meets a handsome young man and they both coo sweet nothings into each other's ears, while the birds chirp round spouting fountains. In other cases, India appears a desolate waste land in which an over-sensitive youth carries on a dialogue with fear and death in terrifying earnestness. Very often India means nothing more than overcrowded cities, squalid and dirty, in which perspiring and tired people eke out a sordid and meaningless existence. However, in certain instances, the same people, living under more or less the same conditions, find meaning, love and happiness in their lives.

There is quite a crop of writers in Marathi who write on rural themes in rural dialects. The villages they describe are sometimes squalid, sometimes idyllic, and sometimes neither. There is, of course, poverty in these villages, but not all writers are bothered by it. This, I think, is all to the good; for poverty, both in life and as a literary theme, can be dreadfully boring. All kinds of people live in these villages. They are not all taciturn, morose and conservative, and the writers find in their lives not only pathos and grim tragedy but also happiness and humour. There are some writers who are concerned or even obsessed with social injustice and class struggle. Their themes are thus noble but their writing is generally hackneyed and propagandist. I

think that this is a fine example of poetic justice, if not of socialism in literature. There are other writers who squeeze plenty of humour out of this country, ridden with poverty and misery; and sometimes they treat it as a setting for slapstick comedies. One should be glad that so much humour has survived the Five-Year Plans, for elsewhere it has not.

Finally, there is the extreme case of a Marathi poet for whom contemporary India just does not exist. He mainly writes erotic poetry and his imagery is derived exclusively from nature and mythology. He is assailed for being morbid, obscene and antisocial. Actually he is one of the finest poets we have. What he is interested in is distilled erotic experience, and he has distilled it out of the rest of life. It is no doubt true that the Bhakra Nangal project or the plight of the masses does not find a place in his poetry. But then neither is poetry appreciated by the builders of Bhakra Nangal!

One could collect a lot of useful information about contemporary India from the works of these writers. One can learn that women do not wear veils in Bombay, that intercaste marriages do take place in India, that trade unions organise strikes and speculators make profits, that there is a conflict between old and new values in our society, that the partition of the country was a grim tragedy, and so many other things. But it would take a lot of effort to obtain this information from literary works, while it can be more easily obtained from other sources. Moreover, the information would not be altogether dependable.

Writers are not particularly well-informed persons. They do not have to be in order to be good writers. The good writers I know have rather hazy minds, which like sponges can absorb matter only when in contact with fluids. In literature, the fluid of emotions plays a lot of tricks on information. Moreover, in an imaginative work, the authors mix fiction and fact. It seems that they desperately want to express or articulate something, and, if facts do not serve their purpose, they unashamedly resort to invention. Perhaps they have a logic of their own. But I would not trust them for facts if I were a historian, a social scientist or a practical politician.

Not only are they untrustworthy regarding facts but they see them in a peculiar perspective, which seems quite wrong to the social scientist and the practical politician, to whom India remains a country primarily engaged in the urgent and gigantic task of social and economic transformation and development. The partition, the Five-Year Plans, the goal of socialism, the formation of linguistic provinces and the border dispute with China are to their minds the major contemporary events. Naturally they expect the literature of the day to reflect the sense of crisis arising from these thoughts or issues. But literary works largely tend to ignore such thoughts and they do not find even a peripheral place in a novel or story. On the other hand, the creators of fiction concern themselves mainly with the frustrations of sensitive lovers, the petty misfortunes of middle class families, the deaths of old ladies, the dreams and sorrows of little children, the obsessions of widows and the subconscious urges that lead to evil and tragedy. These seem to them to be matters of absorbing interest, while the dispute with China is not even noticed.

To the social scientist and, particularly, the politician, all this seems an unsound, flippant and irresponsible attitude. Quite a few distinguished leaders in India have expressed their pained surprise, if not annoyance, at the writer thus shirking his responsibility, while everybody else is putting his shoulder to the wheel (or pretending to do so). These leaders are at least vaguely aware of the powerful influence that a writer can exert on the readers' minds; and they would like him to exert it for the benefit of the country. That literary men should do so is a persistent point of inaugural addresses at writers' conferences.

There are some authors who feel guilty when faced with such a demand. There are others who feel tempted by the rewards that politicians can offer. Both these types of writers produce fiction, poetry or plays that profess to give a "realistic" picture of India and also embody the proper attitudes to the contemporary situation. Their efforts are indeed praiseworthy but the literary quality of their works is not.

It is wiser and more honest for writers to own up that they



really cannot decide what they would write; in the same way, they cannot dictate to their creative mind. A writer cannot say that he will write a poem about the greatness of God, and then sit down to write it. He could of course produce verse that way—plenty of it, but not poetry. Nor can he lead a pious life and expect that eventually only pious poems will blossom out of his subconscious. The stress and strain of a writer's emotional life do reflect themselves in his work. But they get strangely transmuted before they do so. Every creative mind has some aerials fitted to it that pick up only certain kinds of emotional messages which are then transformed by certain psychic valves into poems, fiction or plays. Not all such literary works are first-rate but they are far more genuine than the kind mentioned above.

Sometimes a writer's imaginative aerials may pick up an event of great public importance as a literary theme. When this happens a novel like *War and Peace* or an epic like the *Mahabharata* is produced. But even these, I am afraid, do not serve the needs of the social scientist or the politician. Such works generally appear after the event and therefore cannot meet the needs of the politician; and they do not provide the social scientist with an accurate and comprehensive picture of those events. The account of Napoleon's invasion of Russia which one finds in *War and Peace* is highly selective and leaves out many elements in the situation; and Tolstoy's interpretation of that great historical event is not the only one that is possible or tenable.

In any case, why should writers present a faithful picture or offer a dependable interpretation of events? Why should the present-day Indian writers regard it as their responsibility to depict contemporary reality and take sides? That really is none of their business. That is the task of the social scientists, journalists and politicians. It is they who have the necessary tools for the job. On the other hand, a writer would not be able to accomplish such a task even if he wanted to. The mental and linguistic instruments he uses are not suited to the purpose, being essentially meant for the imaginative exploration of human consciousness and experience.

The main job of a writer, it must be understood, is to

articulate experiences which will necessarily remain inchoate and confused till they are tellingly expressed. He has to weld life and thought through significant symbols and juxtaposition of ideas and characters. It is he alone who can orchestrate into a coherent pattern the emotional responses a thought or deed embodies. It is as worth while a task as that of the social scientist and the politician, and the writer should pursue it without a feeling of guilt.

I think the Indian writers are doing this job as best they can, and, if they get rid of their feelings of guilt and misconceptions about their proper field of activity, they would do it even better. They live in contemporary India and their experiences are partly conditioned and shaped by environment. They continuously experience the impact of environment and try to articulate and shape into meaningful patterns their own individual awareness of it. They may not be writing about the Five-Year Plans, but their concern with contemporary life is as genuine and significant as that of the Planning Commission.

It only remains for me now to remove a possible misconception. There is a view that each age has its own unique awareness. Each age, it is said, has its own spirit shaped by the dialectic of ideas or material conditions; and it is this spirit that a writer tries to discover and articulate. The greatness of a writer, it is held, depends on the extent to which he succeeds in doing so. This is a viewpoint with which I do not agree. Awareness is not the property of any age but of individuals, and to talk of the unique awareness or spirit of an age is an abstraction which could be useful but can also be dangerous. In any case it is an abstraction. A thing called the unique awareness of an age does not actually exist. A social environment provides a framework within which individuals have to live. This framework, to a certain extent, determines the kinds of situation with which the individual members of society are faced in the course of their lives. To some degree this social framework also shapes an individual's responses to these situations. But, within this framework, life can acquire an infinite variety of patterns and it can be lived at different levels.

Thus there is an infinite variety of possible responses to

life at any particular time. These responses can be mutually incongruous, opposite or just different from each other. They do not fuse into anything like a common awareness, and none of them is more valid than the others only because of its moral or historical significance. The writers of any age try to interpret the entire spectrum of these possible responses to life, all of which are equally valid.

This being the job of the writers, it would be wrong to expect any author to discover and express in his work the unique spirit or awareness of our times. The large variety of responses to contemporary life recorded are bound to be evaluated and the authors judged as artists, but this evaluation ought not to be based on the moral validity or usefulness of the responses they articulate.





# IDEAS AND MODERN POETRY

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## I UMASHANKAR JOSHI

**T**HE GREAT modern Greek poet Constantine Cavafy (1863-1933), of Alexandria, relates in one of his poems called "The First Step" how the young poet Eumenes complained one day to Theocritus:

"I have been writing for two years now  
and I have done only one idyll . . . ."

Theocritus rather congratulates him:

" . . . if you are on the first step,  
you ought to be proud and pleased.  
Coming as far as this is not little;  
what you have achieved is great glory . . .  
To set your foot upon this step  
you must rightfully be a citizen  
of the city of ideas.  
And in that city it is hard  
and rare to be naturalized.  
In her marketplace you find Lawmakers  
whom no adventurer can dupe . . . ."

The poet, in short, aspires to belong to the Republic of Ideas, a contemplative world.

No wonder if ideas impregnate a poet's work, and his poetry in its turn helped in its own way in sustaining and even propagating ideas themselves.

The success of our discussion on Ideas and Modern Poetry will largely hinge on our understanding of the three terms involved. For example, we shall have to take note of the fact that the word "modern" will denote a much larger period in the Western context than in the Indian context.

Of the other two terms, "poetry" is notoriously indefinable. In order to get enlightened on the term "idea", I looked up the word in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, which in a short entry makes the sagacious, though escapist, observation that

“there is scarcely any term which has been used with so many different shades of meaning”.

If we tried to get an idea of “idea” with the help of Plato and Locke and Kant, we would easily get bogged down in a purely philosophical discussion. I am afraid we shall have to rest content with the general meaning the Oxford dictionary gives:—

“More widely: Any product of mental apprehension or activity, existing in the mind as an object of knowledge or thought; an item of knowledge or belief; a thought, conception, notion; a way of thinking.”

“A product of mental activity”, “an item of knowledge”, “a way of thinking” — we will be using “idea” in some such sense, though it will not be altogether possible to escape using it more loosely.

Not less important is to understand clearly the relation in which ideas stand to poetry. Those of us who are teachers are aware, if not guilty, of the question often put in the class room and still oftener in the examination hall: What is the central idea of the poem? It is, no doubt, open to somebody to state that “Fixed Fate versus Free Will” is the pivotal problem in *Paradise Lost*. But it would be hardly appropriate to call it the central idea. We rather call it the theme of the poem. What Arnold Bennett says about the novel is true of all creative literature, that it “should have a main theme that can be stated in ten words”.

Surely we do not go to a poem because it formulates an idea. The formulation of ideas is an activity in which poets *qua* poets do not normally indulge. Poets make use of ideas which are available to them. The ideas are always there in the intellectual climate of the age. Poetry absorbs them. Poetry does not embody this or that idea, it embodies the unique vision, which the poet has of things, in its wholeness. “Idea” is from the Greek root *id* — to see — and if one could use the word “idea” in the sense of a vision, then poetry could be described as an incarnation of an idea. But idea is something which is not grasped sensuously, while poetry is. Poetry exists in its form. Ideas pervade, substand, a work of art, they cannot be the *sine qua non* of art. It would be interesting to examine what role ideas play in the

creation of the works of other (I mean, non-literary) arts. I feel it would be possible to find traces of ideas in sculpture, in music even. Poetry, utilizing as it does words as its medium, is more apt to deal with ideas. But being an art, poetry does not aim at making statements of ideas. In poetry we have rather what I.A. Richards would call, pseudo-statements. In short, poetry presents a poet's unique vision and not a particular idea, which is not to say that ideas have not gone into the forming of the poet's unique vision. On the contrary, one can even agree with Goethe that "the success of a work of art depends upon the degree in which what it undertakes to represent is instinct with *idea*." A work of art does not embody an idea, but it must surely be *instinct* with idea. Let me add that we sometimes find that there are poets like Wordsworth who are adepts in keeping ideas on the move. The work of some poets even suggest ideas in an embryonic form, much before they are formulated by philosophers. Croce in his masterly essay on Shakespeare calls him in this sense a "pre-philosopher".

What are the root ideas absorbed by modern poetry? In any civilization, for that matter in the whole history of human civilizations, the seminal ideas are not very many. In the West the medieval age ended and the modern age began with the Renaissance. The main idea that the Renaissance threw up, or rather emphasised, was man's vision of himself. It could be summed up in the Latin playwright Terence's words: *Homi sum: humani nihil a me alienum puto*.—"I am a man and I think nothing that is human alien to me."

Renaissance humanism put man at the centre of things. It developed into the idea of man not as a mere part of nature but as the master of nature. The scientific attitude that Western society developed from the sixteenth century onwards not only opened new vistas of knowledge through empirical experiment and rational inquiry, but also brought quite a good part of nature under human control through technological advancement. The scientific revolution influenced the methods followed in the humanities as well. Secularization was also one of its results. Science became a force, cutting across the boundaries of nation-states.



The basic idea of The Age of Enlightenment was the belief that all human beings can attain a good and perfect life on this earth, and not in heaven after death. To quote Crane Brinton, "the basic belief of the eighteenth century philosophers who formulated the democratic ideal was that the common man can lead this form of the good life now that the material basis lacking to the Greek masses is potentially available to all."

With the idea of human self-fulfilment were connected the idea of the dignity of man and that of individual freedom. Man ceased to be looked upon as a commodity, as an animal.

Burns's poignant cry:

"For a' that and a' that

A man is a man for a' that"

and Wordsworth's sad musing on

"What man has made of man"

highlight the fact that men of sensitivity showed a great concern with the fate of common men. The industrial revolution gave an edge to the demand for social justice, especially in the writings of Marx.

The idea of individual freedom is best illustrated by the fact that the leaders of the opposition in Great Britain and Canada are actually paid salaries. This exemplifies the freedom of thought and speech, the right to question, the right to dissent. Bronowski and Mazlish call it "reasoned dissent" and observe that "the great creative ages have tended to be those in which reasoned dissent was welcome".

The idea of recognising the presence of the subconscious —the hidden part of the mental iceberg — and understanding what a tremendous role it plays in individual as well as social life, after the researches of Freud, Jung and others, has also a great impact on modern poetry.

Ideas are not to be torn out of the context of personalities and events. They were born in the minds of men and created conflicts not only in individual lives but in the life of whole societies and nations. They were absorbed by poets in their work. I cannot do better than quote from Mary M. Colum's excellent book *From These Roots*: "... from this period on, from the latter part of the eighteenth century, what was

meant by progress in literature was to be progress towards the revelation in language, in poetry and prose, of the mass of men, of their lives and experiences. From this time on, too, the history of literature was to become the history of the adventures of ideas and doctrines through the imagination of men. Complex philosophical ideas and doctrines were to have a tremendous motive power both in life and in literature: Civilization took on a new movement, literature took on a new movement. While it would be ridiculous to try to explain any separate work of literature by this or that idea, this or that doctrine, yet the large movements of the mind, the literary schools, the new techniques, were all the outcome of ideas and doctrines."

When we look at the Indian literary scene, the first thing we note is that while in the West the modern period stretches through three to four centuries, in India it begins after our coming into contact with the West—after Raja Rammohan Ray initiated the Indian Renaissance a little more than a century ago. During the last three quarters of the nineteenth century India was overwhelmed with all the major movements that had had—and were still having—their day in the West: the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the Scientific Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. All these movements came one on the heels of the other. There was a great ferment of ideas all over India. To talk of my part of the country: Poets Dalpat and Narmad (born in 1820 and 1833 respectively) were highly sensitive to this ferment. Dalpat hailed the new age of reform and machine. As early as 1851 he wrote *Hunnar-Khan-ni Chadai*: "The Invasion of Machine Khan". Narmad reacted to the subtler aspects of life. He sang uninhibitedly of personal love and gave portrayals of nature tinged with subjective feeling. He coined the word *Swadeshabhiman* and poured out rhapsodic songs of love for the motherland. Both the poets wrote indefatigably a large body of verse on various topics of social reform. In 1844 Durgaram Mehtaji started in Surat *Manava-dharma-sabha*, nothing short of an Association for the propagation of the Religion of Man. The issues of a Gujarati periodical "Jnan-pracharak" carry reports of young Dadabhai Naoroji's

addresses in 1850 and 1851 on topics of Physics and Chemistry. A little earlier Dadabhai Naoroji is reported to be contending with another member of the Students' Literary and Scientific Society—Naoroji Fardunji on which of the two great men of the sixteenth century—Sir Isaac Newton and Martin Luther—was the greater benefactor of mankind. Needless to say, Dadabhai was in favour of the former. Thus in India by the middle of the nineteenth century, ideas were on the march.

The founding of the universities in 1857 contributed much to the consummation of the Indian Renaissance. The graduates' minds imbibed the ideas not only of the West but also those of ancient India, which reached them paradoxically enough via Europe. To refer again to Gujarati, which I am supposed to know a little intimately, Govardhanram Tripathi attempted late in the nineteenth century a synthesis between ancient Indian ideas and modern Western ideas. It is interesting to note that the idea of love-marriage versus marriage-love occupied the serious attention of great poets like Govardhanram and Nanalal. Kant in some of his exquisite poems revealed a vision of the tragic which was new to us. Gujarati poetry also imbibed ideas of Sufism during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

During the period of national resurgence there was of course much patriotic poetry written in the Indian languages. Romanticism was the current mode. All the important ideas of the West had their impact on the poetry that was written. But it is interesting to note that two of the great poets, who wrote in those days, had Eastern ideas as the main motive force of their work, in spite of their very intimate acquaintance with and use of Western ideas. The great poet Iqbal for example wrote under the influence of the idea of the Ego (something very different from perverse individualism), which is so prominent in his *Asrar-i-Khudi*,—"The Secrets of the Self." To Tagore's mind nothing Western is alien, and all the Western ideas flow freely into his poetry. But the sovereign idea behind his whole work is the metaphysical one—*Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma*, All this verily is Brahma.



Rabindranath says in *My Reminiscences* about his play *Prakritir Parishodh*—"Nature's Revenge"—that it "may be looked upon as an introduction to the whole of my future literary work; or, rather, this has been the subject on which all my writings have dwelt—the joy of attaining the Infinite within the finite." The poet wrote to Edward Thompson years later: "It is strange that even when so young I had that idea, which was to grow with my life all along, of realizing the Infinite in the finite, and not, as some of our Indian metaphysicians do, eliminating the finite."

The arrival of Gandhiji on the national scene resulted in focussing the artist's attention on the here and now. The common folk of our famished villages—the Daridranarayana—came to be sung in poetry. There was no idle harking back to the past. One was asked to come to grips with the present. The ancient ideal of Ahimsa was also not to be given just lip-service. One was expected to live upto it as Gandhiji showed by personal example that it was possible for man to do. We find in the poetry of the '30s universal love and compassion as a driving force.

The '30s also witnessed the impact of Marxism on literature. A number of poems revealing social consciousness were written. The movement crystallized in what came to be known as Progressivism. For some time the moon, the cuckoo, the flute, the *veena* were banished from poetry and the destitute were installed on the poetic pedestal. There was something romantic about this realism.

The '40s began blatantly as a romantic reaction. I am talking of Gujarati, and here we can compare notes, for there are bound to be variations in the movements. It was long after all that the second world war meant was felt and understood, even after the agony and frustration of the post-independence period became more and more disturbing, that a new poetry with a significant core of realism came to be written.

During the late '40s and early '50s there was an increasing awareness on the part of the Indian poet of his becoming rootless. But this was, to an extent, compensated for, in as much as he was showing signs of developing a world-

consciousness, of becoming a citizen of the world republic of letters. This is what I prefer to call the Second Awakening, the greatest cultural phenomenon after the Renaissance ushered in by Rammohan Roy. The Indian poet now aspires to record seismographically the malaise in which contemporary man finds himself, he aspires to belong to the *avant garde* of writers the world over. The truth he intuitively grasps to-day is the conflict between human dignity and the mechanistic framework of contemporary civilization. Technology has come to stay. The question is: Will it allow its inventor—man—also to stay, to co-exist? If the answer is to be Yes, then science and spirituality will have to undertake the joint adventure of planning man's life on this planet. Mastery over external nature and controlling human nature would not suffice. What is needed is the "trans-forming" of human nature as Sri Aurobindo puts it.

It remains to be seen in what measure the contemporary poet succeeds in striking roots spiritually, as Tagore in the heyday of the Indian Renaissance could do for himself.

During the past two decades there has been a shift from romantic and declamatory writing to irony and depth and complexity of meaning in poetry. The poets may be open to the criticism that they succumb to the complexities of modern life and do not lift our mind to the massive simplicities beyond. But their work reveals an immediacy. The experience is poignant even though limited. The language has freshness about it. The preoccupation with image and symbol is born out of the desire to reach new levels of poetic meaning and the beauty-aspect of that meaning. There are exciting innovations in rhythm, which though apparently free is authentic. The study of the variations in poetic speech and rhythm under the impact of various ideas would be an interesting one. The early pioneers' voice faltered. Their expressional tools were not adequate. In the high renaissance the university graduates borrowed freely from Sanskrit and emulated such different poets as Milton and the early nineteenth century Romantics. The run-on metre became the vogue. Under the influence of Gandhism and socialism, folk tunes and colloquialisms were

especially welcome. The modernist poetry of our nightmarish cold war period uses free verse and oblique expression, but as I have just suggested, there is a sure sense of organisation about it.

The critics of the poetry written to-day are perhaps wrong in asserting that it is formless. What Elizabeth Jennings says in the preface to an anthology of English poems of the last two decades is more or less true of poetry written in Indian languages with which I have some acquaintance. She says: "... the most marked characteristic of the period which I am presenting is a sense of order, an urge to clarity, a leaning towards formal perfection.... poetry has become a gesture of defiance, a plea for order in a universe of confusion and man-made chaos."

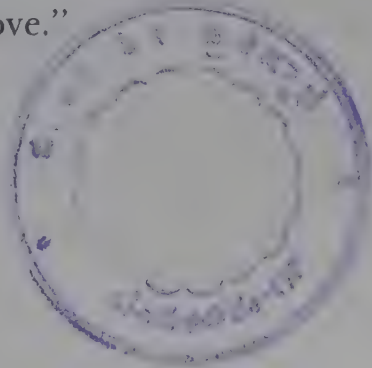
Those of the present day poets who would assert that their work has nothing to do with ideas would also be mistaken. Miss Jennings rightly points out that with the "desire for discipline and meaning have gone an emphasis on the importance and dignity of human personality, and an analytical cast of mind which proves, often with a ruthless honesty, the motives behind human actions and the meaning underlying passion and emotion. Briefly, poetry has become something much more important than a question of competing literary movements or schools and has taken over some of the tasks which in earlier centuries were usually regarded as the special province of the philosopher or the metaphysician."

The sovereign idea that pulsates through most of the present-day concentrated poetry of depth is universal love.

"We must love one another or die,"

—said Auden at the beginning of World War II. It should not matter if one or everybody perished, provided that one behaved humanly while one lived. In that case one glaring fact would survive—the fact that one was capable of love. Says the young poet Larkin—

"What will survive of us is love."





# IDEAS AND MODERN POETRY

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## 2 NISSIM EZEKIEL

**I**N WRITING this paper, I have tried to remember the occasion for which it is intended, and the audience that is going to discuss it. There is no point in giving a survey of modern poetry written in English, or available in English translation, even with a focus on its intellectual content. If that were done, we would find ourselves arguing about the work of mainly English, American and European poets, in a purely academic way, arriving perhaps at some tentative conclusions about the nature and value of their ideas. I believe such a discussion on such an occasion, by writers in a number of Indian languages, would serve no useful purpose. Instead, I have referred to modern poetry in English or in English translation only as an example of how ideas animate it or weaken its power. In the process I have described these ideas and even criticised them, but only in terms of poetic method. I try to show how certain poets put ideas to use and what has been gained or lost for poetry by their doing so. In this way, I have attempted to make this paper relevant to Indian writers, who have their own special problems but who face a similar technical situation in expressing ideas, whatever these ideas may be.

Some kind of an abstract statement at the outset seems necessary to define the subject and indicate its limits. A great deal of attention has been paid to the word modern; the modern mind, the modern approach, the modern consciousness or temper, these phrases are frequently used to characterise contemporary phenomena which is radically different from other contemporary phenomena. Both T. S. Eliot and John Masefield, for instance, are still alive, and both are now quite old. Their work has been done largely in the twentieth century, though Masefield did some of his work before Eliot got started. Both are contemporary

twentieth century poets, but we call only Eliot modern. Similarly, Auden, Lorca, Valéry, Stefan George, Mayakovsky, Neruda and Wallace Stevens to mention only seven belonging to seven different countries and writing in English, Russian, French, German and Spanish, are all modern, though the differences among them are enormous. They have very little in common, except that they are modern. I believe that this distinction exists today in all languages, including the Indian ones, that it is a valuable distinction and ought to be pressed. The poets I have mentioned are modern because they have tried to find a language which will match the actual speech habits, rhythms, and typical attitudes of the twentieth century. In form they have ranged widely through the history of poetry, using what has been used before, but in new ways, and they have also scrutinised folk traditions or committed themselves to absolute novelty, as in much free verse. They have avoided conventional forms used in conventional ways, established rhythms and techniques, standard images and phrases, the whole tone of the age preceding theirs. "Make it new"—Ezra Pound's advice to young poets, was advice they found instinctively acceptable as a principle of modernity. I take this as my starting point for a discussion of ideas in modern poetry.

We are concerned with ideas in poetry but not as ideas capable of being separated from the poetry. This also it is necessary to make clear, lest the ideas be discussed and the poetry ignored. Today, poetry is not used to do things which are better and more profitably done in prose. If the poet merely has ideas which he wants to propagate or even to analyse for the sake of a personal need, he does it in prose. About the poetry of the past, too, we know that it remains meaningful for us even when the abstract thought in it is no longer of interest, if we feel far removed from it or even if it is thoroughly discredited. Perhaps it is true then that in good poetry ideas appear not only as ideas but as the poet's experience of those ideas, as suggestive of a world of thought, as symbol related to other symbols, and as a unifying principle with roots in the poet's biography as well as in the national consciousness. In the best modern poetry we encounter ideas of this nature, often reflecting current

ideas in the social, political and philosophical spheres, but expressing, as Eliot once put it, what it feels like to have those ideas.

Eliot's own poetry revives, among the many things it does, a feeling about God and Man and the soul of Man which was originally expressed in the great European mystics. Sometimes he reproduces their contemplations in virtually *their* language within his own poetic framework, sometimes he comments on the different Ways which they found for themselves and seeks his own Way, but always he embodies the whole in the particular tradition of belief which is the most important from his point of view. I mean of course the Christian tradition. I am reminded of a statement by Albert Schweitzer in his book *Indian Thought and Its Development*. "We await the Indian thinker," he says, "who will expound to us the mysticism of spiritual union with infinite Being as it is in itself, not as it is set down in the ancient texts or according to the meaning read into them by their interpreters." In Indian poetry of a certain kind, say the religious-metaphysical kind, the poet who performs this function or the lesser function of relating himself to that part of the Indian tradition, in the manner of an Eliot, will do the greatest service to the renaissance of India. The commentator, the interpreter, the populariser, each has his role in the scheme of things, of necessary ideas, but none so important as the poet who feels again in the language of his time what was felt before in an earlier language.

In a modern context, in a modern manner, Eliot expresses in the following passage an old mystic feeling, and gives it a new life:

O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,  
 The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant.  
 The captains, merchants, bankers, eminent men of letters,  
 The generous patrons of art, the statesmen and the rulers,  
 Distinguished civil servants, chairmen of many  
 committees,  
 Industrial lords and petty contractors, all go into the dark.  
 And dark the Sun and Moon, and the Almanach de Gotha,

891.106  
 P.E.N.



And the Stock Exchange Gazette, the Directory of  
 The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed  
 Directors,  
 And cold the sense and lost the motive of action.  
 And we all go with them into the silent funeral,  
 Nobody's funeral for there is nobody to bury.  
 I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you  
 Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre,  
 With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of  
 darkness on darkness,  
 And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant  
 panorama  
 And the bold imposing facade are all being rolled away—  
 Or as, when an underground train, in the tube, stops too  
 long between stations,  
 And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence,  
 And you see behind every face the mental emptiness  
 deepen,  
 Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think  
 about:  
 Or when, under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious  
 of nothing—  
 I said to my soul, be still and wait without hope  
 For hope would be hope of the wrong thing; wait without  
 love  
 For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet  
 faith  
 But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the  
 waiting.  
 Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought,  
 So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the  
 dancing.

(East Coker)

One does not need to point out how the imagery in that passage is of our time, how perfectly it suits the feeling being expressed, and how effective the technique is of moving from the abstract idea to the concrete particular, and back again.

The Russian poet Mayakovsky had very different ideas.

His revolutionary idealism was expressed not only through poetry but in the Soviet mass education programme, in speeches and articles, in agitational and political action. In him we have an instance of the poet abandoning his independence for loyalty to an ideology. Scrutiny of his work leads one to wonder whether inferior ideas don't make for inferior poetry. However tautly and sincerely it is put, there is no consolation in the poetry when the ideas go counter to the normal instincts of humanity. When Mayakovsky laments in explosive verses his failure to find a channel for his aspirations, it is easy for us to sympathise with him. "But where," he says, "can a man/like me/bury his head?/Where is there shelter for me/. . . The gold of all the Californias/will never satisfy/the rapacious horde of my lusts/. . . . I shall go by,/dragging my burden of love/."

That burden of love eventually accepted an idea that alienated him from himself, expressed memorably in the following verses, which constitute, from one point of view, the high-water mark of communist poetry. "I want/the Gosplan to sweat/in debate,/assigning me/goals a year ahead./I want/a commissar/with a decree/to lean over the thought of the age./I want the heart to earn/its love wage/at a specialist's rate./I want the factory committee/to lock/my lips/when the work is done./I want/the pen to be on a par/with the bayonet; and Stalin to deliver his Politbureau/reports about verse in the making/as he would about pig iron/and the smelting of steel. 'That's how it is,/the way it goes. . . /We've attained the topmost level,/climbing from the workers' bunks/: in the Union/of Republics/the understanding of verse/now tops the prewar norm. . . ' "

With political ideas, the poet needs a metaphor which will pervade the poetry rather than specific statements, unless he makes them for satiric purposes. He can then use the device of exaggeration, fantasy and understatement to carry on an open polemic against the forces to which he is opposed. In a serious poetic vehicle of political ideas, a structural principle is of great assistance. In his famous poem on the Spanish Civil War, for instance, Auden creates poetic myths about the past and the future, and contrasts them with the grim as well as the prosaic realities of the

present, counterpointing both sets of images against images of an ideal future. Thus:

Yesterday the installation of dynamos and turbines;  
The construction of railways in the colonial desert;  
Yesterday the classic lecture  
On the origin of Mankind. But today the struggle.

Tomorrow the rediscovery of romantic love:  
The photographing of ravens; all the fun under  
Liberty's masterful shadow:  
Tomorrow the hour of the pageant-master and the musician.

Tomorrow, for the young, the poets exploding like bombs,  
The walks by the lake, the winter of perfect communion;  
Tomorrow the bicycle races  
Through the suburbs on summer evenings: but today the struggle.

Today the inevitable increase in the chances of death;  
The conscious acceptance of guilt in the fact of murder;  
Today the expending of powers  
On the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting.

Auden's is almost a case history in the study of ideas in modern poetry. Sometimes he is content to versify them as best he can and rely for his effects exclusively on their inherent intellectual excitement. He borrows ideas from a hundred different sources, most of which he acknowledges. The psychological and scientific explorations of our time are studied for material which is sometimes transformed into poetry in lively images and sometimes merely restated in poetic terms. In either case his work is useful to the critic and the poet, apart from the pleasure to be got from it, for its intellectual content.

All the major ideas of our time are alive in Auden's poetry. Though he has been rightly criticised for shifting his viewpoint once too often, for failing to provide continuity, for not integrating his ideas into a coherent whole, for somewhat devaluing ideas through irony and paradox, Auden is important, from the point of view of



is admired now in our country is thin, sentimental and mawkish because of the confusion in our minds between personal emotions and emotions as embodied in language. Many examples can be cited to illustrate this point from the lesser Romantic poets and even from the greater ones when they nod without knowing it.

Our Indian poetry abounds with instances of this kind. They can be seen in the plethora of our nationalistic patriotic verses and in our spiritual effusions. The point is that a poet has to make something out of his emotions, not just convey them through language as he would convey some information to his neighbour. For poetry is something done in and to language. What is personal to the poet has to undergo a sea-change to become something "rich and strange", before it can be called poetry. This sea-change has to be effected in language with all its traditional and unconscious depths and levels. This awareness is at the very heart of modern poetry.

Modern poetry aims at being a total articulation of the mind of which emotion is only one of the constituents. The mind, the inner being, is a whole like an atom, and it may be split into emotion and intellect only for the convenience of analysis. A dissociation of one from the other is sure to lead to a lopsided development, unwholesome and ugly. In the earlier phases of human development speech itself was, perhaps, poetic in the sense that it was a total externalization of the mind in which emotion and intellect were one. The development of reason as distinct from the emotional aspect of the mind has been at best a mixed good. For it has split the mind leaving behind a radio-active gap in which much of the finest of humanity has been lost. The symptoms of this disaster are to be found in such modern manifestations and visitations as loss of values, vulgarization of taste and commercialization of art, mass violence and schizophrenia. In the same manner, when in revolt, emotion is abstracted from the mind and isolated from intellect, it degenerates into such unwholesome manifestations as sentimentality, mawkishness, verbosity and theatricality. The effort of modern poetry has, therefore, been to bring about once again a fusion of emotion and

intellect and restore the mind to its original state of wholeness and health. It is for this reason that the best and the most sensitive minds in all the nations of the world have been seeking relief in poetry from the nightmare which is called the modern world. For poetry embodies a human truth more organic than the great discoveries of science.

Thus from its very nature modern poetry cannot but assimilate ideas into its being, but this process cannot go beyond a limit. That limit is set by the range of actual experience possible on the vital level and also by the limitations of the particular language in which those ideas are to be embodied. For no student of poetry can have the temerity to say that a mere versification of ideas makes poetry. Ideas can be used to further the range and depth of emotion only so far as it is possible to find emotional equivalents for them, and these emotional equivalents can be found only within the range of actual concrete experience. Only those ideas that can be assimilated into the emotional context of the poem enter and enrich it. The rest of the ideas, however noble or exalted, have to be excluded from poetry and shifted on to the limbo of philosophy. For philosophy as such has no place in poetry. A poet may use a philosophical system for his own purpose, and his purpose is different from that of a philosopher who is engaged in finding and systematising ideas purely on an intellectual level. For the poetic use of ideas we get the best example in Eliot. His *Four Quartets* for example, use many ideas derived from Bergson and other sources, but each idea is balanced at every step by its emotional equivalent derived from actual experience. The ideas about time which are stated in the beginning of "Burnt Norton" are at once concretized by such images and symbols as of footfalls echoing "in the memory/Down the passage which we did not take/Towards the door we never opened/Into the rose garden". The whole poem is sustained by a personal urgency to find a pattern in one's own experience in the context of the experiences of other minds at other places and times. Ideas can be used only thus in a poem.

We, in India, I think, have to bear this point in mind when we try to interpret, appreciate or write a poem. For

we have been inflicted with the dire dropsy of verbosity and a veritable diarrhoea of ideas. To the traditional stock of our own Indian ideas we have now added many more from the West. In fact both emotions and ideas ooze from us as from a porous vessel, and verses gush out in such a rapid flow that it is high time that we stopped and considered the state of our mind. Having set before us impossible ideas for ages there has been no alternative for us but to mouth out those ideas and find for them a verbal fulfilment of the most sickening kind. At the same time on the vital level we lead a life as sordid and earthly as could be found elsewhere. Happily most of us are quite unconscious of the terrible dichotomy, the yawning gulf between what we say and do, between what we actually experience and what we write. Modern poetry is a challenge to this lack of integrity in our people in general and writers in particular. For it demands a strict correspondence between what one has to say and the language employed.

Ideals get debased when they fail perpetually to get realised in action and ideas become odious when they fail to get embodied in language. When this becomes rampant it stinks everywhere, and the finest feelings and sensibility are forced to seek shelter in isolation and loneliness. We as writers in India have fallen on evil days. When we get up to speak, our sole aim is to impress by an exhibition of all our histrionic talents. Why should it be so difficult for us to speak in a natural, unaffected manner as man to man? When we begin to write we assume a role, a pose; we forget the actualities of experience and exude airy nothings. The pernicious tradition of the sycophancy of the court-poet is still strong with us. We have to get rid of this and begin to write strictly on oath what we actually see, feel and experience. For it is not great ideas that make great poetry but an absolute integrity of intention and execution. To achieve this I think we have to undertake a hard and conscious cultivation of reticence, of practising before preaching both on the national and the individual level. The writers, especially, ought to cease to mistake ideas for realities and bear in mind that poetry or literature is something done and not merely something said.



## IDEAS AND MODERN POETRY

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### 4 M. V. RAJADHYAKSHA

A FEW years ago a British weekly set a competition on "Cynical Definitions". Poetry seemed to provoke a large number of these would-be cynics. Here are two of their efforts:

Meaning: The conveyance of precise ideas by means of language, now abandoned in poetry.

Obscure: Profound.

Of course, they meant modern (or, modernist) poetry. Either it was the old irritation of the so-called "normal" man with the way poetry and all its attendant solemnities were forced on him in his days of innocence—a protest against all poetry, that is,—or it was the new irritation caused by contemporary poetry in its refusal to explain itself, to yield a smooth set of ideas (one of them 'the central idea') to whomsoever was looking for them. Poetry, to them, is only a prettier or a more forceful way than prose of expressing ideas. The modern poet thinks differently, and so there is trouble.

Not that this protest of the common man should be dismissed lightly. The appeal of poetry has shrunk to an almost undecipherable minority, a very self-conscious minority, consisting mostly of poets and would-be poets. Dylan Thomas once jokingly spoke of a poetry magazine with a circulation of seventeen poets and a lady who had once met Kafka's aunt. This tends to reduce poetry to a private mystery, and its language to a confidential code.

But, except for those (and they are not, relatively, a small number) who affect the mystery and the code as proud marks of modernity, the difficulty seems to be almost inevitable. The isolation of the poet is a very real problem. It is, in a sense, an image, if one might say so, of the isolation of man. Man does not seem to fall into a com-

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fortable place—his well-upholstered corner, as it were—in the universe. He does not seem to belong; he is the outsider. Aware of this, the poet is incapable of spinning out versified spiritual comforts. Worse, he looks around, only to find that the community has none of the wholeness they thought there was. He looks within himself and is bewildered by the complexities he had never suspected there were. How can such a poet speak in the authentic voice of a people, or of an age, or of eternity, and not be a poser? In England, for example, in the sixteenth century or the nineteenth, a poet could be such a voice—at least of the majority. In the twentieth, in order to be that he has to be a ventriloquist, a very naive person, or a plain charlatan! The fragmentation of society, the disappearance or weakening of those bonds of religion and tradition which made for homogeneity, the reeling pace of change: all these prevent the honest poet from “connecting” the world within with the world without. Even the world within defies connection. He cannot connect himself with himself. It is like dialling the wrong number, as the image goes in a poem by B. S. Mardhekar, the doyen of the modernists in Marathi. *Asambaddhata* (i.e. unrelatedness,) is a favourite word with Dileep Chitre, one of the most distinguished of the younger Marathi poets. His favourite image is of “the broken”.

Tormented by privacy, many a poet of this kind would seem to escape from it—into further privacy. He has no patience with, and he is suspicious of, generalizations, for they are too facile and too firm for his perplexity. Also, accepting them would mean establishing “contact”—being one of many. And he has a holy fear of being common. In that mood he is liable to equate ideas with generalizations, —with creeds and tenets. They are a little too all-inclusive for his temperament. He wants to be excluded; he wants everyone to be excluded, if that were possible. The didactic, he recalls, was rampant in older literature, particularly in our languages. Even in “modern” times, so much of our literature set out to instruct, directly or indirectly. Even as recently as in the nineteen-thirties, much of English writing—and, under its influence, much of ours—was politi-

cally committed. It has since lost face; most of the writers themselves have hurriedly disowned it. It has been dubbed, and damned, with the label, "propaganda". And so, by a not-too-subtle association, thought and generalization and didacticism and propaganda are lumped together into an unsavoury mess.

It would be best to ignore those who take the extreme position referred to above because it has been the fashion to take it. That, too, has hardened into a creed with its pious claptrap. It is not averse to propaganda, either; only, it propagates *against* something. Let us think of poets, and of critics of poetry, whose distrust of ideas is not just a matter of reaction, or merely negative, but is integral to their personality.

Why, then, are so many of the poets of today sceptical about "ideas"? Modern knowledge has shaken so many of our erstwhile certainties. The irrational seems to be encroaching on what was regarded as a safe preserve of the rational. The sense of mystery deepens. You can no longer tell the normal from the abnormal with the old assurance. Most "opinions" or "ideas" presuppose such a clear division, in their bearing on man's life. To be aware of these uncertainties is to be bewildered, to feel helpless. All your fine intellectual equipment somehow seems to be no more than a flimsy veil. "Argument and opinions and learning—and yet you are finally left naked", as Vinda Karandikar, another well-known Marathi poet of today, says. So does Mardhekar: "My knowledge is bounded by the burning ghat".

But this is no protest against ideas. It is a protest against allowing one's poetry to be a passive vehicle of other people's ideas, or of ready-made ones. If there is a sense of frustration, it is with reference to vaunted ideals which have proved to be hollow. Simple solutions arouse irony. But there is behind all this, in most of them, a positive faith, or at least a groping for one. May be, it is a private faith—one not meant for general prescription. It may not look it; it may wear all manner of masks, including a clown's. It may even mock at itself. The chaotic is the theme of many of them, some of whom, again, are so

bemused by the theme that they use (or affect) a chaotic idiom. They would dislocate language for it. But that would be to put it into a new gear, as it were. Even the surrealistic, with all its patent and flaunting irrationality, and its flamboyance, betrays a design and a purpose. The design is not imposed on the poem; it is the thought—the living, intimate, “felt” thought—which has done the organizing.

The contemporary superstition that impassioned expression of an idea is anathema to poetry stems from the fear of certain agitational ideas. These ideas imply a whole lot of men thinking-and-feeling alike, bound by a common urge, and are therefore detrimental to the insularity of the poet. But some of the world’s finest poetry was written by men who were deeply moved by ideas. The ideas ceased to be mere logical statements. They glowed with life. They were a part of the being of the poet, and they took the fine edge of feeling. It is not great ideas that make great poetry; the poetry is in the ferment they cause, in the intensity with which they are felt. To turn to Marathi poetry, once again, for an illustration, *Tutari* (The Trumpet), a well-known poem by Keshavsut, is a powerful plea for the destruction of the old social order. Yet the current prejudice against poetry of this kind would devalue the poem. But to the sensitive reader, uncorrupted by passing theories, it remains a first-rate poem. And some of the most effective poems in contemporary Marathi have sprung from ideas; they are a comment on our life, or a vision of the future, or they speak of the restlessness which comes with “a whiff from the unknown.” Anil appeals to the Deity to leave him alone, and not keep him from growing up by looking after him all the time. The title of the poem, *Sangati*, reminds you of a famous *abhang* by Tukaram, a 17th century saint-poet. In fact, it is a variation on it. Tukaram was not just preachy; he argued in his poems with man and with god. But he translates the contention into poetry.

There’s the rub! If you do not believe in an idea passionately enough, if it has not got into your bloodstream, your statement of it cannot be poetic; it will be



merely logical, and lukewarm. Mediocre poets have used ideas as ready-made material for poetry, and produced bad poems. But mediocre poets will write bad poems, however up-to-date and "artistic" the attitudes they strike. Even good poets have written mediocre poems "on ideas". But then the best of poets nod, sometimes!

It is not "on ideas" that good poems have been written, from the outside, that is. The idea is not stiff and static; it is, rather, a movement, a vital process within the poet. There is a counter-movement, that of the poet's being, and, therefore, a conflict, which gives the poem a dramatic ring. The idea may be common property; but in every poem energised by it, it comes to birth over again. It is, in that sense, unique, as every true poem is unique. It is the idea in its nakedness, shorn of the inessential. It is the poetically distilled essence of the idea.

Some of us ask for "absolute poetry". But that need not imply a poem without meaning (or with only a "clinical" meaning, as somebody says,) unless you take the word "meaning" in a very schoolmasterish sense. If a poem has a meaning for the poet, it must have one for the reader. It is not some presettled and inflexible meaning. It is a search for meaning, an adventure. In prose, you explain an idea to others; in poetry, you explain it to yourself.

Like Tukaram here, John Donne writing at the same time in England, argued passionately in verse. Other poets, of even older times, have done it. So have contemporary poets, all over the world. Not every poet need do it, if it is not given to him. But if it is, the solemn injunction "poets shall not make poems out of ideas" will not avail.

## IDEAS AND MODERN POETRY

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### 5 MADHAO ACHWAL

**I**N THIS paper I will not be so much concerned with the "Modernness" in Modern Poetry, and the particular type of "Ideas" which seem to find a predominant place in it, but more with the nature of Ideas; of Poetry; the relation between the two, and the particular aspect in which this problem of the relationship between Ideas and Poetry appears to the Modern Poet.

Poetry and Ideas are obviously related to each other, but what their precise relationship is, can, I think, be made clearer if we consider them in the context of a third factor to which both of them are related, and from which both draw their substance—namely Life itself. This third point will enable us to look at both of them from a better perspective. In thinking about Poetry and Ideas, in the context of Life, it is one particular aspect of the nature of Life which appears significant. Life is a continuously evolving phenomenon; it is an unceasing "becomingness" of things; it is a flux and movement, and every moment or state in it is but a middlepoint, which is in a double tension of what has already "become" and what is yet to "come". Time and space are not just gaps or abstract "nothingnesses" between two static states of being but are themselves charged with the vital force which passes through them and makes us realise these states of "being". To reveal the essential nature of life (which is what both Poetry and Ideas aim to do), it will not only be sufficient to take cognizance of the states of being, but also of that which lies in and between them, the vital force, the continuous unceasing movement, which makes the states what they are.

The human mind is constantly straining to grapple with the essential nature of this "vital force". Forming "ideas" is the mind's way of going about this business. Whether in

the psychological sense, or the metaphysical, Ideas are, by their very nature, abstractions of and from perceptual experience. It is as if the mind creates a screen on which perceived or imagined experience is projected and viewed. It is therefore obvious that to form Ideas one must first look at experience from "outside", as it were. From this outside perspective, Life always appears as a series of "states". Just as a cinematographic view cuts reality in a sequence of independent images, transfers the movement within the "reality" into a different type of movement, and then only can create the illusion of reality, so also, Ideas can only deal with the flux of Life, after breaking it into a series of states. Ideas can only deal with "Becoming" in terms of "Being". This is the inevitable way in which mind can act on matter. No matter how fine and subtle the mind that conceives the ideas, no matter how infinitesimal the divisions it introduces between two states of being in the effort to touch the vital force of life, it can never succeed in doing so, for this effort is almost like trying to draw a circle with the help of straight lines. It is not "in" the two states but always "between" two states that the vital force worms itself. This hook of Ideas is therefore incapable of catching this particular fish.

The problem becomes still more complicated when it is through language—with words—that the Ideas have to be expressed. Words are symbols of symbols and thus twice removed from reality. The language structure is a linear structure, and is governed by the laws of logic, grammar and syntax. All this makes language ideally suited to deal with whatever is rigid, static, and common (as against unique) in experience, and perforce Ideas have to reduce life to these terms before they can grapple with it, and "statements" are able to express what they have caught. Thus, because of their essential nature in terms of both content and form, Ideas remain external to reality. Their externality is in direct proportion to their distance from perceived experience. Sensations, emotions and thoughts, the components of our conscious experience, mark off, in that particular order, this distance from reality, and the quality of abstraction of Ideas is partly determined by the choice of



the particular aspect of experience that Ideas have chosen to deal with. The more objectively, i.e. in a detached manner, one can look at an object, the more possibility there is of one's being able to view and therefore to understand its nature. This direction of the mind's search is therefore towards "understanding" the nature of reality and the vital force that lies behind reality. This is one way in which "Ideas" find themselves on the march—the way of intelligence resulting in sciences, starting from Biology, via Physics towards Philosophy.

But if "understanding" the vital force is one way of grappling with it, there is another way also. It is the way of "recreating" the very "feel" of the vital force. This is the way of the Arts, and the Artist, by juxtaposing creation with creation, aims to approach the vital force directly, not with the help of his intelligence, but his intuition. This process is similar to cutting a circle with another circle, and at the points where the new circle cuts and in so cutting coincides with the original circle the vital force can be directly "felt". It is, therefore, not with explaining the nature of the vital force or to use a Bergsonian term—of Pure Duration—that art is concerned, but in revealing it directly, creating the "feel" of it.

In the evening, we see a bud, and go to sleep. We wake up in the morning and lo! the bud has become a flower. Seeing the bud *and* the flower, is how one normally sees the world. The sciences will explain how the bud turned into the flower, in certain specific environments and through specific chemico-physical processes. Art "shows" you the bud changing into the flower. It is not with the two "end-states" of "Being" that the artist is concerned, but with the whole process of one state "Becoming" another. The poet was awake in the dark silence of the night and saw the bud evolving into the flower. Nay, further. He became the bud to realise, within himself, it's evolution. But the process of evolution was a process of silence and pure duration. In it, the "twoness" of things had been totally replaced by "oneness" changing itself, and the only witness of this phenomenon was the phenomenon itself. The poet has now to transform this silent evolution in terms of words. He

desires to give us the "feel" of pure duration through the use of sequential and temporal states of Being. He has to be "within" things, and "out" of them at the same time. Poetry, thus, crystallises the problem of Art in it's most complex, and yet most pure state. The poet's essential problem in creation is that he cannot give an objective existence to his own realisation of the process of "Becoming", except with the help of Ideas. But Ideas are what we saw they are. He cannot use them as they "come" (because their very nature goes in a direction opposed to his intention), nor can he do without them. Let us pause here a moment and look at his dilemma a little more closely.

"All men are mortal". An idea incorporating a profound truth, no doubt! But precisely because of it's profundity, it's too general generality if one can say so; precisely because of its nearness to the pole of intellect, though I can fully grasp and understand what is meant, I find it difficult to see "myself" in the "All". But if a poet is not concerned with the "I" he is no poet. The only way he can look at "All" is through this long thin slit called "I". A poem from Baudelaire makes me "feel" something of this "profoundness". But if one asks what is it that the poet had given me, I can only point at the poem because what he has given cannot be stated in any other manner, nor in any other form, expression or words, except that which is the poem. Within it, the "idea" shed everything that connected it with "Being" i.e. it's rigidity, it's static quality, it's fixity, it's detachment from everything surrounding it, it's temporality and it's abstract generality, and was integrated into the phenomenon of "Becoming" so totally that it had no separate existence apart from it. In fact, it found itself in Poetry, by negating itself as "Idea". It caught and held within itself the rhythm and the movement of vital force, the reality of Time and Space and all the tensions of an individual consciousness coming in juxtaposition to this reality, and became "Becoming" itself all over again. It found its own existence recreated. And here we see the parallelism that provides the wedge through which Ideas can enter poetry. In Poetry, the Idea has itself to go through the process of becoming, to be able to reveal the content

of that part of this whole phenomenon of Becoming, which it encloses. It is only in this manner that an Idea can become "poetic" and be integrated in the poem.

But in reality, "a poem is not made," as Mallarme once said, "with ideas, but with words." Ideas are the inner, silent speech of speech which must be expressed in words, for it to realise itself. The nebulous quality, the silent tonality, the shades of colour which are attached to ideas must find their respective equivalents in words for a poem to be born. The difficulties created when ideas are to be expressed in language, were dealt with earlier. But the saving factor for the poet is that words in a language are symbols and as symbols they can always approach reality only indirectly. This fact helps him to give as much perceptibility to Ideas as he wills, retaining at the same time their nebulous quality. This is a process of remoulding the Idea by creating tensions around it, which can make it dynamic. The dimensions of meaning, tonal quality and evocation of words makes available to him an instrument with which he can achieve his objective. But this whole process is a process of re-finding the language, or creating a new language within the framework of the existing language.

A poet is a poet in proportion to his ability to so integrate this "idea-logical" content of his poetry in what is the "embodiment" of the Idea, i.e., the form through which the idea has been made perceptible—that one is unable to see this 'Idea-logical' content separately. This unique relationship between the content and the form is the poetic quality, no matter in what particular field of human activity it comes in evidence. The poet's field always lies between, on one side, the most abstract, general and bodiless form of Ideas—thoughts—and on the other side, the sensually felt experience, between the extremely static to the extremely mobile. The nearer the Idea lies to the pole of Intellect, the greater the resistance it offers to submerge itself into the flux of "Becoming". Hence we find that among ideas, thoughts are hardest to be integrated into a poem, and when not properly integrated, stick out like sore thumbs. The nearer the idea to the pole of Intuition and direct



contactual experience, the easier it allows itself to be drawn into Poetry. But just precisely because of it, it requires a greater poet to deal with the thought-content of experience and still be able to transform it into poetry, and we find that the highest form of poetry is sometimes precisely that which deals with this content. The significant characteristics of a poet, as a poet, are revealed in the particular manner in which he deals with ideas.

The poet of today is very keenly aware of this central problem of poetry. Much of the poetry of earlier times, in a broader aspect, was descriptive poetry—poetry dealing with the externalised aspect of Reality—a poetry of “Beingness” than “Becomingness”. Even in Epic poetry, we find this attitude of looking at things from “outside”, but the epic poet succeeds in lifting himself so much up, and above the world of human beings, and from this altitude shows us such a vast panorama of life, that in viewing it we get a feeling of pure suspension, as one gets in an aeroplane high up in the sky. He succeeded in catching pure duration through his macroscopic manner of seeing. But shorn of this scale and altitude, the lesser poets, even at their best, could give us only a descriptive poetry. The idea-logical content of this poetry could be felt, as well as expressed, apart from its particular form, the poem itself. Today, with the heightened consciousness of our times, the poet’s attitude has changed from the macroscopic, to the microscopic. He has realised that to give a direct feel of the vital force of Life he has to deal with the “becomingness” of things, and this “becomingness” cannot be felt unless the poem—which is a structure of Ideas built with words—is a “becomingness” itself. Within it the Idea must itself go through the process of its own evolution, must partake the vitality of creation, for it to be integrated into Poetry. In this realisation, the essential problem of Poetry—the contradiction between the nature of Idea, as Idea, and Poetry, posed at the beginning of this paper, is finally resolved.

## EAST-WEST DIALOGUE

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### 1 Dr JAL F. BULSARA

**Y**OU WILL pardon me for straying among this assembly of writers, though I do so on invitation. It is, however, with no small trepidation that I am here, for I do not claim to be a creative writer like most of you. My only qualification, if I have any, is that I have been able to withstand the ordeal of four long sessions of literature and poetry and a longer survey of humour among them, and am still able to appear before your critical presence, sound and sane.

The title of my paper as assigned to me by our esteemed Hon. Secretary, Shri Gulabdas Broker, contains at least four pregnant words, viz. "contemporary", "social changes", "the Orient" and "cultural life". Writers of the eminence assembled here would readily appreciate that such pregnant words can bring forth many issues, whose sex, race, colour, creed or connotation can be subjects of heated controversy among any assembled galaxy of intellectuals.

The essential object of our Conference, however, not being to generate heat but light, the Hon. Secretary has set me a formidable task indeed, for, unlike the tiny firefly, man has not yet succeeded in producing light without dissipating some heat. Further the object has to be accomplished in 2000 words and 20 minutes. You will therefore pardon me if I shirk the difficult and laborious task of defining my terms and go straight to the subject, trying to put some meaning and content into them and fulfil my task of saying something intelligent, and I hope intelligible, on the subject of "Contemporary Social Changes in the Orient and their repercussions on Cultural life".

I would straightaway make it clear that by the "contemporary period", I imply by and large the post-World-War-II period. With regard to "social changes", I refer to changes in the thoughts, manners and behaviour of groups and

communities, reminding my learned audience that groups and communities are ultimately composed of individuals, wherein alone the seeds of ferment of thought, attitude and action are first sown, and where alone they sprout, germinate and grow, of course through the contact and clashes of many minds and hearts. You will notice that while talking of "social" changes, it will be extremely difficult to ignore that very potent sphere of life of groups, communities and nations, which we have been wont to classify as "economic", "industrial", "monetary" or "material". We cannot forget that that sphere of life occupies from 8 to 12 hours out of 24, of the majority of able-bodied adult men in all countries of the world, whether opulently or poorly endowed by nature, and already advanced technologically or still in the process of development. Nor can we ignore the now patent fact that economic activities and the distribution of wealth earned thereby exert a very powerful influence on the social structure, mores, customs, thoughts, ideas, ideals and political organisation of the people engaged therein. Many wise heads have been trying for years to demarcate the geographical, territorial, longitudinal, climatic and cultural boundary lines of the East and the West, of the so-called Orient and Occident. I have not yet known any cartographer, ethnologist, statesman or even politician, who has succeeded in this ever-elusive task. Though individuals do not count in such mass assessment and evaluation, it will not be considered out of place, if I point out that in many an Eastern land of my visit including my home country India, I have been regarded as a "western" in thought and bearing, and in many a European and American country as an "eastern" slightly contaminated by western education and contacts. This personal experience of double cultural allegiance is supported by the further observation that I have found quite a substantial number of well-educated and semi-educated men and women west of Berlin clad mentally, sartorially and even culturally in a completely eastern garb; and a far larger number of similar men and women east of Suez presuming or parading, not only their eastern reading, thinking and drinking, but also openly owing allegiance to



western culture, political institutions and ideology, and what is sometimes slightly disconcerting, even loudly proclaiming western patriotism, in an accent and manner sounding more western than the westerner's.

The fourth pregnant phrase in the title of my paper is "cultural life". That it is not easy to define this language symbol, static in content and yet dynamic and comprehensive in connotation, will not come as a surprise when we refer to the tomes which have been written about people's cultures, which sometimes have referred almost to the entire life complex of tribal and technologically advanced societies. Amongst primitive tribes, a considerable part of their purely economic activities like food gathering, food growing or food procuring is intimately interwoven with myth, religion, art, tradition and ritual. It is therefore difficult to say that cultural life is only that part of life which is dissociated from the total activities of groups and communities devoted to earning their livelihood. Nor can we say that cultural life includes only literature, fine arts, like music, dancing, song, drama and decoration, for people, devoid of such literary and artistic expression, can still be found to be cultured in many other ways—particularly in their talk, bearing, behaviour and manners and etiquette.

If this be sufficient justification for avoiding fine definitions, you will now permit me to explore our abstruse subject a little further. I have not with me the statistical data of all the countries of the Orient on the various aspects of their social life to convince you of the truth of my statements and observations. In fact, I do not know enough of the social life of all the 1500 million variegated peoples of the Orient to hazard an informal opinion about either the contemporary social changes through which they have passed or are passing, nor their impact on the finer nuances of their cultural life. What I will be saying will therefore be broad generalisations, largely without statistical authentication. Further, on a subject like the one I have been asked to speak on this morning, one can only give one's own personal observations, analysis and inferences. I do not claim for these any finality, nor the vaunted infallibility of

dogma. In fact I would urge you to take much of what I say with a pinch of salt. In spite of this disclaimer, if any amongst you are so credulous or gullible as to find in my pronouncements any profound revelations, even these need not trouble the rest of the august audience, because of the simple fact known to all writers and thinkers—that all historic revelations, prophetic or otherwise, have been uniformly questioned by lesser mortals. I would therefore not only recognise your democratic right to question mine, but would actually welcome you to do so. For it is only by a free and frank exchange of many-sided views and candid personal comments that we can ever hope to get some light shed on subjects like ours, which are treated on such a vast canvas as the Orient and the Occident and their respective cultures and values.

In considering contemporary social changes in the Orient, you will permit me to mention both their external garb and their inner motivations. To take two random examples, in the course of my extensive travels in the Middle, South and Far Eastern countries after the Second World War, I noticed a strikingly larger number of the indigenous inhabitants of almost every country wearing western style clothing in preference to the traditional native dress. Equally, a very large number of the westerners have shed the ceremonial 'Black Coat and Tie' on formal occasions, and even their inseparable lounge suit or uniform in offices and on visits to homes. Secondly, a very large number of Europeans and Americans now want to be invited to the homes of the local inhabitants and to be served with local dishes and in traditional style at that. Substantial numbers of the indigenous populations, especially in larger towns and cities, have taken to eating western articles of food, cooking western dishes, serving and dining in western style, and even observing the formal table manners of the west. Quite unimportant changes perhaps in the external trappings of cultural life, dress and food. But you will appreciate these do not come about in orthodox or tradition-minded communities without some internal mental and attitudinal ferment. For there was a time when westerners were neither keen to go to native homes, nor were the natives willing to

invite the beef-eating *mlechhas*, the pork-eating kaffirs, the gentiles or infidels to theirs. Not long ago, no Khan Bahadur or Rao Bahadur could think of attending an evening party without a woollen tail coat, however ill-fitting on a brown or dark body and however uncomfortable in the steamy tropical climate. This was the strict vogue extending from Suez to Sourabaya, and all respectable people respected the sacred tradition. If this has changed under the exigencies of a world-shaking war and its pregnant aftermath, it shows a distinct liberation of men's minds in the East and the West. The patrician society has declared to the plebeian that it does not matter if you cannot afford a Black Tie or a Frock Coat. Come to our parties and functions, we will welcome you in your national dress, in lounge suits or even occasionally in shirts. And the plebeians and natives have equally magnanimously thrown the inner sanctums of their homes and commensal hospitality to the foreigner and non-believer alike. Eating meat and drinking wine are no longer considered heinous crimes, deserving of excommunication or purification, but signs of an advanced or progressive mind or liberated soul—and this in very strict orthodox Bania or Jain communities, or among the followers of the Buddha, the prophet of Ahimsa.

There are similar fairly radical changes noticeable in the religious beliefs and practices of the peoples of the orient, in their attitude to ritual and ceremonial, in their overall mental outlook, in their social and cultural life, in their familial and social organisation. Some changes are taking place far more rapidly than sociologists would have dreamt of predicting 25 years ago on the basis of their study, knowledge and experience of the history of classical, medieval or modern societies. Mores and hoary traditions do not any longer die so hard as of yore. As man's longevity is increasing with the advance of medical and biological sciences, the life span of traditions and customs is shortening more quickly than before. Human society is no longer stagnant or static; it never was, it was always on the move, always changing, even if slowly. But the dynamism of social change and the liberation of mental prejudice or inhibitions are to-day gathering rapid momentum, both in the pro-



gressive west and the inert orient. These rapid changes are taking place under the impact of widely spreading education, injection of technological processes in agriculture and industry, promotion of health services reducing or destroying the innate fear of man against the insidious onslaught of obnoxious spirits, industrial development and more secure food procurement on a national scale, so as to prevent the erstwhile paralysing fear of hunger or prospect of starvation. Those liberating forces are further buttressed by the political consciousness of each country, comprising many local communities and groups, having been brought together under one flag and scheme of governance, with the slowly emerging and solidifying sentiment of a common national destiny *vis a vis* other similar nations emerging on the global canvas, and establishing diplomatic relations on a footing of equality and national integrity, and with the inevitable affiliation to the world fraternity of the United Nations.

In order to know how each of the above several factors, viz. education, economic and industrial development, political organisation, import of technology, better health measures and greater social security, has influenced the mental outlook of individuals, groups and communities which in turn is instrumental in bringing about the overall social changes, we will have to refer to various studies, investigations and researches, which have been made and are proceeding in various countries of Asia and Africa, and even South America and Oceania. For it is in these developing regions, that we are told we find communities at a certain stage of development, which savants are trying to typify as "Oriental" as distinct from those in Western Europe and North America, which boast of being classified "Western", and therefore to some extent superior in some subtle or mystic manner. This implication of innate clandestine superiority of some nations over others, the author of this paper has personally been unable logically or scientifically to distinguish, as already referred to in the opening paragraphs of this talk. Although, to be fair, one has to admit, whether one likes it or not, that these groups of western nations do indicate a highly mechanised physical

infra-structure, a wide variety of technological gadgets, (which, unlike the manual labour of the oriental countries, do a considerable amount of hard and difficult work for man), better health and sanitation systems, much less unemployment, almost universal social security, a higher and satisfying standard of living, less wide gulfs between different income-groups, a certain range of political stability, and diplomatic maturity and finesse. With these advantages, there go a more homogeneous society and better adjusted national solidarity, an alertness to political rights, privileges and obligations, and a lively sense of the democratic functioning of the administration, with greater respect for the dignity of human personality. Above all, they are not too many and not too poor, which makes a lot of difference both in their esteem for higher values and a marked superiority of refined and cultured living for the vast majority of their populations.

We must be ready to admit in this sense that the Oriental societies have a very great leeway to make up, and it will not help us a bit if we try to gloss over this obvious difference by superficial arguments about ours being a different spiritual outlook and basis of life in the Orient, and the people being essentially more happy and peaceful as against the restless, selfish, individualistic and luxury-loving citizens of soulless western societies. I am afraid a serious student of the life of the human family cannot subscribe to such a facile evaluation of the cultural life of the two blocks of human beings, because the stream of human life and the ultimate values, which, apart from their governments, the peoples trying to express, evolve and achieve are essentially one and the same. Some nations in the cosmic chronological calendar may have advanced faster than others because of historical circumstance and the clash of various physical and social factors. Nonetheless one is inclined to believe that the long-range potentialities of cultural expression and the attainment of civilised values are not much dissimilar for various geographically separated human groups and communities, admitting that geological and geographical factors and resources would to some extent qualify or limit people's material achievements.

Such differences would not, however, affect their fundamental values of the good, true and beautiful, nor their potentialities for spiritual attainment.

Thus certain phenomena of social development, which we are witnessing to-day in the oriental societies are not fundamentally different from what the West experienced after the Industrial Revolution. A vast and hungry population from the villages of Asian and African countries is migrating to towns and cities. Society, through the instrumentality of the local Municipality or the State Government has not undertaken more seriously, as it should, the responsibility to provide housing, the second fundamental necessity of good life and culture, and therefore the spectacular growth of slums and slummy conditions in every single city of Asia and Africa—Delhi, the capital of India, or Peking, the capital of China, being no exception to the general rule of slumdoms in cities. This physical aspect of urban development again has its social and cultural repercussions on the life of the people. There is no common idiom of understanding between the 60 to 75 per cent low-income groups living in bad, inadequate, crowded housing, the 20 to 30 per cent who are tolerably housed, and the 5 to 10 per cent who really enjoy urban life in clean and comfortable island homes—their own or rented. There is evident positive physical, mental, moral and spiritual deterioration of millions of citizens in the cities of Asia and Africa. An obvious unsocial feature, which any one visiting slums notices, is the sullen resentment of the average slum-dweller towards an inquiring visitor or municipal official. The slum-dweller is so fed up with the stench, overcrowding, and shortage or absence of civic amenities that he is disgusted and resentful of inquiries, which he says, he has often heard before, without any result accruing therefrom. The effect on the life, thinking, manners and habits of the young and of the women—either daughters or mothers—could not be wholesome in such tryingly unpleasant conditions.

Although the very existence of slums in cities, i.e., seats of civilised life, should ordinarily be taken as a negation of human values and ennobling cultural life, it has to be said



to the credit of a substantial number of our fellow citizens living in slums that their pertinacity, resourcefulness and power of resilience are so remarkable that they survive the soul-destroying environment and still remain decent human beings, bringing up their dear children as likeable little urchins and making for normal family life. This problem is certainly not small in the numbers involved. India alone has an urban slum population of 18 to 22 millions, and it is rapidly growing and multiplying. Asia may have easily 60 to 75 million slum-dwellers in towns and cities, provided we accept the myth that all dwellers in villages live in a spacious paradise compared to the squeezing squalor and sordidness of slums in towns and cities.

Another remarkable socio-demographic phenomenon which we are witnessing to-day is the inordinately high birth-rates all over the agricultural orient and the unprecedented exodus of younger and abler men from the villages and their influx into towns and more particularly into larger or metropolitan cities. Only a normal phenomenon of physical mobility of persons from one area to another, some might be inclined to say. But this rural migration of millions in Asia and Africa, mostly in search of employment, or for the satisfaction of certain other needs and desires, is fraught with very significant concomitant social, economic, political and cultural problems, which defy solution, because the socio-cultural implications of the movement of such large masses and the congregation of the like and unlike in small, compact circumscribed areas, has not been understood or fully appreciated by the administrators and planners, or by the movers and the receivers themselves. There is no time to go into their manifold repercussions on urban society here. I will therefore content myself with referring only to one or two aspects of this phenomenal mobility of individuals and families in the orient now, as happened in the occident before in the wake of the Industrial revolution, teaching us specific lessons, which we are unwilling to learn or profit by.

So long as vast numbers of people move unregulated, there is bound to be an acute housing problem anywhere—even on the moon in spite of the astronomical cost of travel

to that planet. So long as the supply of houses remains grossly inadequate, two inevitable consequences will flow from it. Men will not move with their women, and the civilising influence of woman and family will be lost on men. If forced by circumstances or the legitimate desire for family life to call their women, slums are bound to arise, where land is owned by a few and building materials are costly. This situation will in turn give rise to bachelors' chummeries, pavement dwelling, overcrowding, vagrancy, juvenile delinquency, adult crime and commercialised vice on a large scale, for the simple reason that the more powerful instincts and urges will overpower the weaker social restraint and moral inhibitions. The sense of social belongingness, which is one of the finest and healthiest aspects of rural life anywhere in the world, in spite of its many other restrictive or stagnating features, will be weakened or completely lost in such an artificial, arid and brutalising milieu. To quote only one example, which can be repeated in every large city, Calcutta is one of our most masculine cities, with 1754 men to every 1000 women. The majority of these men arrive young in the city between the virile and adventurous ages of 16 to 30. In a socio-economic survey carried out by the University five years ago, it was found that one out of every ten working women declared that she lived on the earnings of prostitution. The city of Bombay has 1666 men to every 1000 women, with social features and problems not dissimilar from those of Calcutta.

The finer fibre of man and more especially of woman, and of this moral tone every well adjusted society has quite an abundance, will try to assert itself more tenaciously, the coarser the conditions of living. That is why we see the singular spectacle of islands or oases of rustic charm, gentility, coyness, hospitality, cheerfulness and a sad but winning fatalism, in the midst of some of the grossest squalors and indecencies of urban life, directly militating against the possibility of building a cultured life befitting the dignity of human personality. Cities are supposed to be seats of civilisation, or centres for efflorescence of higher moral and spiritual values. Some of these do evolve in and emerge from our towns and cities, but at what cost and at

what unnecessary sacrifice of the *élan vital* or life force of the majority of our innocent men, women and children? We see life in the gross, and we are so immersed in our little circles which we make by way of escape from the coarseness around us, that we hardly realise that good life and plain living and high thinking are the privilege and preserve of only 10 to 30 per cent of the staid or the lucky-by-accident. The 70 to 80 per cent suffer by deliberate design or studied lack of it. Most cities in Asia are an open indictment of the moral values which we are so wont to flaunt in the face of the westerners.

I would not like at this stage to refer to the impact of the factory, mill, and workshop—the symbols of western technology—on the social life and moral values of the so-called working class, or of the western importation of the office, showroom, and the laboratory on the Indian baboo, the compliment of the white-collar worker. The influence is both good and bad according as you adjust them to your native genius and indigenous environment. Japan, to my mind, provides in parts one of the finest and most encouraging examples of adaptation of western technology and organisation to national tradition and way of life. Countries like Burma, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia have been trying but with no success worthy of mention. India with her more than 3000 castes will find it a herculean task to evolve a homogeneous or integrated industrial society, reflecting the finer points of our hoary Vedic, Aryo-Dravidian and Buddhist civilisations, and our modern thinking and out-look. What is happening to-day in the towns and cities of India with regard to the integration of the large variety of castes and communities, what kind of culture complex and ethical values they are evolving individually for each homogeneous group and for the heterogeneous groups coming into contact with one another under the heavy pressure of a variety of social, economic, civic, linguistic and cultural factors and moral and immoral forces, are phenomena worthy of a much deeper study not only by sociologists, writers and thinkers, but equally by the Universities and the political and administrative departments of Local, State and Central governments.



We have a fair number of economic, trade and monetary studies with the support and encouragement of the Research Programmes Committee of the Planning Commission with a research fund of Rs. 75 lakhs, but not enough social or sociological studies, which are much more subtle and difficult in so far as it is not a matter of counting heads, adding numbers and preparing statistical tables, but searching the minds and hearts of men, and observing, understanding and analysing human behaviour and inter-personal and inter-group relationships over a sustained period of months and years. And yet it is a singular phenomenon in our country that well-intentioned politicians and public men and women gather together for a day or two, discuss sociological problems and phenomena of tremendous emotional and moral import across the table, analyse the subtle functioning of hoary traditions and the behaviour of large groups, and almost nonchalantly issue overnight ready-made resolutions suggesting programmes for resolving social and spiritual malaise of country-wide magnitude. One wishes complex society were to move towards intended goals in this tailor-cut fashion. If it did, we will have very few problems left at the end of a Five-Year Plan, since we have so many well-meaning politicians, public men and self-styled leaders' in our vast sub-continent, who daily offer us easy solutions of our manifold ills.

It remains for me now to allude to the great upsurge in the development of drama, literature and fine arts in the post-independence era in most oriental countries. Such a social upsurge is an inevitable consequence of national liberation; and so the efflorescence of the various components of culture including a revival, both imitative and critical, of ancient art and modern folklore, is to be seen in almost every country of Asia and of Africa, though to a much lesser extent in the latter, because of the wide-spread absence of a written script and popular literature amongst many an African tribe. Only a few, however, of the local urban populations come under the sway of indigenous art, culture and literature. Intelligent observers will quickly note the avid desire of urban people, mostly engaged in repetitive operations day in and day out in the factory or

office, for recreation and excitement to break the drab routine and uneventful monotony of daily life. They seek this relief wherever they can get it, hardly knowing how to use their discrimination, but buying what is purveyed to them by artists, producers and purveyors, who know, or hire psychologists and sociologists to tell them what the masses would avidly take or swallow.

The one sure medium of recreation America, the land of invention and enterprise, has discovered and perfected is the film, catering to various tastes of the literate, and illiterate alike. No student of society can ignore the all-pervading influence of the American film on the minds of the peoples of the world, especially the young. On the benches and sands of the seashores of Bombay, Singapore and Hong Kong, under the shady avenues and in the gardens of Delhi, Colombo and Tokyo, and in taxis and cinema houses all over Asia, it is a sight to see young eastern youth making love in western style—a phenomenon, which was rare in the pre-World-War-II period, and indulged in only by the unconcerned, seasoned westerner. *The Guardian* of Manchester commented in its issue of 30 March 1962 that “the worst influence in television in the United Kingdom came from the American Crime Thriller serials with their cheapening of life and degrading of values”. The influence American films have on the behaviour, manners and morals of young boys and girls, especially of the higher grades of schools and colleges, is well worth a study, as the film is a very potent visual medium of impressing ideas on susceptible and undiscriminating minds, as the cinema habit is the almost exclusive cultural recreation of the majority of students, and as the habit is growing and spreading among the semi-literate workers. With the philosophy of *maya*, renunciation, asceticism and the other-worldly attitude of the masses in the orient, and yet with their love of spectacle and cheap entertainment, the thinking sections of the public must contrive measures to resuscitate the national theatres, which have been paralysed by the American film. They should encourage financially and otherwise the provision through the cinema, radio, television and revival of folk art and a living local or itinerant theatre,

of appropriate recreational entertainment to the vast multitudes, who are clamouring for it, as their social life is undergoing a rapid change, particularly in towns and cities.

The last war necessitated the creation of the United Nations; and that premier world organisation of sovereign governments, by its global activities and help programmes impinging on all aspects of life, educational, social, economic, technical, aesthetic and cultural, has made an unprecedented inroad into the lives of the peoples of the underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa, Oceania and Latin America. The close contact of a large number of western experts, savants and technicians with their corresponding counterparts in host countries has brought a very definite western social, cultural and spiritual influence to bear on oriental minds in high and low places. On the whole the impact has been healthy and the peoples of the developing countries have gained a good insight into the thoughts, attitudes and way of life of the citizens of the American and European continents. Economic aid and technical assistance have flowed in a fair measure from the West to the East.

This was all to the good in the earlier years of the United Nations. But very soon a cleavage occurred leading to the emergence of the now too familiar Power Blocs. In the mutual rivalry to gain friends or adherents, a race began to possess the minds and hearts of men and women of the aided countries. For the last ten years one hears almost a sickening chatter of nothing being more important for men who think than to belong and stand for one or the other bloc and ideology. Truth has become a casualty, and facts, which should be sacred, are contaminated at the source and served to the public duly whetted or garbled. With aid, vast funds have come into the hands of the aiding powers in the form of local currencies. These appear to be freely used by both parties, either to win the attention of students, the intelligentsia, or business and professional men, or to aid their adherents. Large numbers of young and old men and women in the developing countries, where poverty is severe and widespread and opportunities relatively few, are succumbing to the lure of lucre equally with the rich, who



want aid in foreign currency to enrich their country or earn more riches for themselves. If this is a cold war phenomenon of purchasing the souls of men, this political practice has not been taken seriously even by our writers and authors, some of whom have themselves become indiscriminating partisans, thus betraying their profession, which should seek to enlighten men and not to lead them astray. Independence of judgment is now at a discount; it is being scoffed at or deliberately misunderstood. Strange to say, our angry young men of the orient have not escaped the tragedy. Most of them get righteously angry with us and with things indigenous, while at the same time leaning heavily on the support of foreign capital and labour of one or the other hemispheres.

Here is where those who esteem truth, appreciate values, and understand the stream of human evolution and advancement, through the eternal vigilance of a few prophetic men and women, have to stand guard and show to the erring, including the seducer and the seduced the true path—the path of understanding, clear judgment and honest interpretation of the dynamics of life and society. One is constrained to observe that truth and values, humanity and brotherhood, honesty and trustworthiness are not the exclusive monopoly of one or the other block. Here is where the great service, which an outstanding personality of our age, the Vice-President of our organisation, and a prophetic statesman of all times, has rendered to all humanity, needs to be appreciated more than the world has so far cared to do. For, supposing most of us have a lot of money left with us after we have lost our souls and self-respect, where will our vaunted culture be?



## EAST-WEST DIALOGUE

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### 2 WILLIAM MULDER

**I**N his famous novel, *Passage to India*, E. M. Forster describes a garden party attended by English, Indians, and Anglo-Indians: "The ladies adjusted their saris, and smiled. There was a curious uncertainty about their gestures, as if they sought for a new formula which neither East nor West could provide." It will be my contention that the new formula our divided world so urgently seeks may after all be an old one. A modern parable illustrates my meaning:

Once an American father came home from the office, tired, and like most American fathers who come home from the office tired, he sat down in his easy chair with the evening paper. But his little daughter sought him out: "Daddy, tell me a story." He could not be bothered. She persisted. The father's eye fell on a map of the world in the newspaper, showing the trouble spots, the disputed boundaries, the partitionings—together a graphic presentation of the conflict between continents and cultures. It occurred to him that he could keep his little girl busy for a while if he cut up this complicated world map into a jigsaw puzzle. He did so and sent her on her way, thinking to enjoy prolonged peace. But in a remarkably short while she was back with the map put together. "How ever did you manage that so quickly?" he asked. "Well, Daddy, I found the world awfully hard to put together, but when I turned the pieces over I found somebody's picture on the other side. So I just put him together, and then I had the world."

The solution, of course, is at once too simple and too difficult. One-man revolutions are the most durable but the longest in coming, for they involve the change of heart that the Buddhas, Christs and Gandhis call for. If we could all be philosophical anarchists, like Thoreau, governing our-

selves through inner discipline and the light of regeneration, governments would not be necessary and politicians would go begging. But producing a whole man involves more than putting the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle together. It involves the creation of conditions favourable to his growth. Salvation is social, of necessity relying upon imperfect means to bring about more perfect ends, and leading too often to the dilemma of moral man in immoral society; for it is one of the ironies of human nature that men individually of good will, together commit enormities. And they commit these enormities because, in spite of their good will, they live by half truths, dividing the world into east and west, north and south, black and white, the haves and the have-nots, the high and the low, the left and the right—what you will—when all the while, no matter how we divide the apple, the seeds of a common humanity lie at the core.

Mankind is the whole truth. His various labels are only half truths. It is only a half truth to call a man a communist or a capitalist, a Hindu or a Muslim. He is man, a member of the human race, a person who like Shakespeare's Shylock laughs when tickled, bleeds when pricked.

That East is East and West is West is itself a half truth. The terms are relative, and I use them mindful of all the historic and contemporary exchanges between them, and mindful of certain provincialisms on both sides which persist not only in popular imagination but also among intellectuals. Is there indeed a "Western Man" and an "Eastern Man"? Is the East passive, the West active? Is all the mysticism in the East, all rationalism in the West? We can make too much of the dichotomy, forgetting that the hemispheres are only geographical abstractions and Greenwich time man-made. But we can also make too little of it, as do the One Worlders who keep reminding us that we are all brothers under the skin and make believe that the differences of history and culture are not as basic as our biological oneness. In my optimistic moments I subscribe to this belief, but too often events prove that just the little difference may make all the difference.

After we have made full allowance for the relative meanings of East and West, startling distinctions do remain,



distinctions which to Kipling made East and West seem fundamentally incompatible. Certainly the pleasure-seeking crowds at Coney Island, New York's famous beach resort, seem to have little in common with the ceremonial bathers along the Ganges, except their seething numbers. The ineffable experiences of Yoga are hardly the postulations of Western experimental science. But it may be that these are differences which, rightly understood, make East and West not incompatible but complementary. If East and West are ever to meet in more than the wary diplomatic encounters which the headlines daily and desperately proclaim, they will have to meet in the middle, in the vital center of the human condition where they will discover they need each other and have certain irreducible truths to teach each other. If we are to have both bread and beauty, the coming world civilization will need the aesthetic and intuitional wisdom of the East as much as the resourceful and commanding technology of the West. "Both sides," says Vera Micheles Dean, "must perform an act of imagination." They must see the world through each other's eyes.

In this direction, the growing encounters of East and West through books and periodicals, while not as dramatic as the meeting of Prime Minister Nehru with President Kennedy in Washington, are in the long run perhaps more significant. In Hyderabad the other day I discovered that *Islamic Culture*, the quarterly published there by the Institute of Islamic Culture, has more subscribers in the United States than in India itself. More Americans than ever before for an outlay of 35 or 50 cents are getting their first glimpse of *The Glorious Koran*, *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha*, *The Upanishads*, and Lao Tzu's *Way of Life*. These are available in paperback everywhere—at the corner drugstore, the supermarket, and the magazine racks as well as at university bookstores. Together with the Hebrew and Christian scriptures already familiar to the West, these comprise a world bible, an ancient source of enduring social ideals which every faith can recognize as its own. Fruit of a remarkable religious period from about 800 to 600 B.C. in India, Persia, China, and Palestine, these ideals prescribe for the enlightened conduct of nations as well as

of individuals. A return to the fountain, paradoxically enough, may yield a very modern secular hope: the hope of a genuine world outlook.

A world view is long overdue in the West. The West's condescension toward the East—matched only by the East's disdain of the West—has been slow to dissolve. It lurks even in the praise the West now accords an "awakening East." The implication is that the East is awakening to Western standards. The West admires only the reflection of its own image and not the East in its Easternness. This parochialism is an old story. To the Christian evangelists, the East has always been an infidel East; to the disciples of Progress, it has been an illiterate and poverty-stricken East, the white man's burden; to the Marxist liberators, it has been a colonial and downtrodden East. Each Western wave of reform has been equally full of self-pride, determined to stamp its image on a supine East and equally determined that the East should be grateful. In *My India, My America*, Krishnalal Shridharani writes his indignation: "The very notion (of missionary evangelism) implies a superiority complex as well as an impulse of self-righteousness. . . . One cannot describe it as a human desire to share with fellow-men things that are found personally precious. Such a desire would turn into fellowship, into discourse, never into a drive for conversion."

It has taken the West until our own time to revise what Charles Frankel calls its "habitual perspectives on history," to recognize the relativity of Western culture and its limited validity for others. Bishop Jacques Bossuet's seventeenth-century account of the fall of empires is an early example of the West's failure to accord the East an adequate place in history. Though he called it a *Discourse of Universal History*, it fell far short of a world view. His single pre-occupation was to establish Christianity as the one great event in all of history. He passed over Mohammed and the Orient without a word and touched on Greece and Rome only as they formed part of the preparatory Gospel.

In the 18th century the Enlightenment, feeling the impact of the new science and Europe's expanding contact with the rest of the world, did a little better. Voltaire, critical of

Bossuet, called for a philosophic view of history based on principles of universal reason and applicable to all civilizations. He was reputedly the first to use the term "philosophy of history." But the rationalists, for all their efforts to be "universal," to see history without provincialism, fell into an error of their own as grievous as the error of Christian teleology. Beset with the idea of Progress, a lineal view of history, they saw it in Western terms and served up their own teleology as presumptuously as the evangelists. They proved equally insensitive to the intrinsic values of the East.

But today a major revolution in the balance of world cultures has given the East parity with the West. The West can no longer afford a superiority complex. The triple revolution of the East, which is bringing it in a single lifetime the political, social, and economic gains which the West evolved over several centuries, teaches us a new tolerance born of respect. For the West's own salvation it needs a philosophy of history that will be a tool of inquiry and not, like either the Christian, liberal or Marxist doctrines, a means of persuasion or propaganda. The West needs to understand what Chester Bowles calls "the new dimensions of peace," and how in pursuit of national independence, civil liberties, and a higher standard of living the whole East has been stirred to heroics. Prime Minister Nehru nearly thirty years ago described the ferment. In 1930, during one of his periodic imprisonments at the hands of India's British overlords, he wrote his thirteen-year-old daughter a letter, one of a series which became his *Glimpses of World History*. "In history," he wrote, "we read periods in the life of nations, of great men and women and great deeds performed. Do you remember how fascinated you were when you first read the story of Jeanne d'Arc, and how your ambition was to be something like her? Ordinary men and women are not usually heroic. They think of their daily bread and butter, of their children, of their household worries and the like. But a time comes when a whole people become full of faith for a great cause, and then even simple, ordinary men and women become heroes, and history becomes stirring and epoch-making."



A West that has known its own rise from feudalism and primitive agriculture, its own Renaissance and Reformation, its own political and industrial revolutions, should understand the throes of the East. The West cannot dismiss "a whole people full of faith for a great cause" as the faceless millions of the Orient.

Neither a merely Western view or scale of values nor a merely Eastern view or scale of values will produce a culture able, as Frankel puts it, to "absorb and transcend the differences between men." We look hopefully in our time to a synthesis in which both East and West will find use for their peculiar gifts. "Synthesis" has become the magic word in contemporary critiques which would save and promote the best in divergent cultures to their mutual enrichment. "Sharing" is perhaps the layman's word for it. But either word hides a profound enigma. How many people share what is unique? How may they come to understand and appreciate that uniqueness in the first place? Despite the difficulties and disappointments history records in man's hope for a world civilization, are there philosophic and even literary grounds for believing East and West can effect a cultural rapprochement?

At first look, philosophy points to a predicament rather than a possibility. We might call it the ethnocentric predicament because it poses for a culture the problem the egocentric predicament poses for the individual. Not all the good will in the world can sidestep an inherent difficulty in epistemology. It is as impossible for a culture to step outside its own skin as it is for an individual to step outside his. Cultures, like individuals, see only through the coloured glasses of their own subjective experience. We can never really see ourselves as others see us, nor others as they see themselves. Hadn't we better accept the predicament at once—let the Arab dwell in his tent, the New Yorker in his penthouse—and philosophically abandon the dream of world understanding because, philosophically, each of us dwells in a world of subjective experience so private we can hardly be sure common knowledge is possible between individuals, let alone whole cultures? Theoretically the ethnocentric predicament faces us with a kind of solipcism for cultures.

But only theoretically. Imagination rescues cultures as it rescues individuals from this frightening prospect. In practice we do communicate and share a commonsense body of knowledge, suggesting that all experience, however private and diverse, is response to a single reality. In practice we recognise correspondences and share what William Ernest Hocking calls an "intersubjective experience." The "I think" of individual experience becomes the "Thou art" of social experience. The individual remains unique, inviolate, while at the same time part of a larger community. Similarly, cultures—indivisible wholes like individuals—may enjoy such an intersubjective experience, recognizing in their uniqueness but different responses to the single reality of mankind and his universe. Cultural uniqueness so understood will, paradoxically, unite rather than divide the world. "I and thou" is international as well as interpersonal. A culture may be both local and universal, like a tree with roots deep in earth called China or India or America but with branches reaching into the upper air that blows around the world.

These assurances are philosophical only. The great practical task remains of bringing peoples and cultures to appreciate the shade of each other's trees instead of wanting to cut them down. Both sensitivity to the ethnocentric predicament and faith in the anchorage all cultures have in a common reality will enable East and West to share what at first seems so unique and indivisible. Here is a task for literature and the arts, for I do not mean simply an exchange of the transitory artifacts of culture—kimonos from Japan, bells of Sarna from India, tea from China—and the ritual and atmosphere which accompany them. I mean a participation in the persisting and undefinable essence of a culture, its subjective life, its habits of mind and feeling. Literature and the arts afford such participation, and through such participation we find the pulse of the ethnocentric predicament if not its heart, and penetrate a cultural privacy as nearly as we ever shall. This is the "felt life" of literature. Such penetration and participation are a creative process, best illustrated in learning a foreign language: "Listen first, then imitate, then be ready to create."

This creativity must precede the full understanding East and West seek, and it comes only through knowledge *of*, not merely through knowledge *about*, each other. The knowledge *of* comes only through vital acts of the imagination, through—I apologize for using the term again—intersubjective experience which literature and the arts provide. Otherwise increasing material contact between people who have no deeper understanding of each other is a great peril. They will only irritate each other. An occupation officer on Okinawa who cannot cast off his own clichés of thinking will not understand why Tobiki village wants a teahouse under an August moon much more than it wants a local chapter of the imported Women's Protective League.

In some areas it may be quite impossible to communicate. Take the amount of romantic love in Western literature, for example. There is simply no equivalent for it in the Buddhist or Confucian world of arranged marriages and filial pieties. "I do not understand the movies," says a Japanese student, "but I go to learn the English and the strange love." Yet wherever parallels, however remote, may be detected, we approach common ground. Caste lines and color lines are both glass houses. Neither Indians nor Americans should throw stones. And consider how much it helps the Westerner to remember the hidebound classes of his own feudal history, or for Christians to remind themselves of the self-righteous believers and the untouchable sinners in their own community.

Again, something as difficult to understand as the Oriental passion for saving face becomes entirely plausible when it is seen as a device whereby he comes to terms with a particular view of reality. The Oriental, feeling himself finite, as F.S.C. Northrop points out, is reluctant to be too determinate in a life at best precarious and contingent. You ask a rickshaw boy, says Northrop, whether he can take you to the nearby wharf in a given time. The distance is short, the time ample, and nothing seems more possible. But the coolie will say, "Perhaps." Lin Yutang tells us how appalled he is at the American businessman who knows months ahead that he will be in Paris on April 16 and leave for Vienna on the 7-45 train. Now if an Oriental has been



rash enough to make a commitment he cannot fulfil, he has grievously offended his fundamental code, and he must save face, that is, come gracefully to terms with the humbling facts in a humane and ceremonious process.

The Oriental, for his part, must revise his image of American self-reliance and materialism. Self-reliance has really meant cooperation, and materialism has been instrumental, a means not an end, leavened by the doctrine of stewardship which acknowledges that the earth is the Lord's and man but steward of it. This is the gospel of wealth which has seen the rise of the greatest philanthropies the world has ever known, a socializing of wealth which has accomplished in the United States in the last fifty years what has aptly been called "The Big Change." If there is any counterpart in the United States to India's doctrine of non-violence it is the loving care Americans give their possessions, extending to the fruits of labour something of the sanctity given labour itself. Such care is a spiritual quality, a care sorely missed in the East. It is not possession, but the loving and thrifty care of possessions that they may better serve the ends for which they are designed, which is the mark of Western civilization. It is a mark of character to keep your car, your house, your yard, your books in good repair and your animals in good condition. It builds character to be taught reverence for the life of things as of people.

Understanding is one thing; imitation is another. Understanding and imaginative sharing may enrich, whereas imitation may destroy. The ethnocentric predicament should give any culture bent on imitation pause. Arnold Toynbee in "Islam and the West," apropos of Turkey's complete Westernization, declares that partial adoption fails because any civilization, any way of life, is an indivisible whole. It cannot master the art or technique of anything without living the life that goes with it. As it becomes more conscious of the individual, more democratic, will the East develop the tragic sense of the West, which as "the deepest sense of our humanity" may be the greatest contribution the West will yet make to the East? And will the East be happier for it? Or will it result in ulcers?

And will not the East eventually have to face the dilemma of the West: industrialization and technology are productive of man's well being, yet they threaten fundamental human values. The East looks at the West's machine civilization and asks to what extent even democracies are forced to appraise the individual in economic terms, manpower like horsepower. Is there a way of escaping this subtle devaluation? Perhaps both East and West will learn how to humanize the machine. Like the Chinese proverb about the horse and cart making not two but three—the horse, the cart, and the two together—East and West may learn to adjust not to each other so much as to the common problems of the one world their meeting will create.

The ideal of that one world itself needs to be approached with realism as well as imagination. That the world is one is also only a half truth. Reinhold Niebuhr warns us that our ideals, however imperative and absolute, must nevertheless reckon with the fact that we live in the realm of the historically conditioned, subject to pressures and environmental limitations that cannot be entirely put aside: "The moral ideal is a compass point, not a destination: while a fixed orientation to north and south is essential in order to move in the general direction one has chosen; while if one sets one's course unconditionally north or south, one will find oneself at last only in a polar waste. One steers by the fixed North Star, not in order to reach an ideal north, but in order to find a fair haven."

Eighty-five years ago Walt Whitman, seeking fair haven for his soul, gave his generation a symbol for the meeting of East and West. In his great poem "Passage to India" he celebrates the laying of the transatlantic cable, the opening of the Suez Canal, and the completion of the transcontinental railroad across the United States, three links spanning the globe in 1869, a "marriage of continents, climates and oceans," heralding the cultural and spiritual union of mankind. Passage to India, the fabled goal of westward exploration as it sought the ancient East, the "realms of budding bibles and elder religions," is further a symbol of the soul's voyaging to realms of "primal thought,"

a joyous launching out in a universe that is also one. "O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God?"

In our own day a Sherpa and a New Zealand mountaineer have given us another lofty symbol for the meeting of East and West. Late on the morning of May 29, 1953, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay reached the summit of Mt. Everest, the world's highest mountain. For fifteen absorbing minutes they stood looking down on the world below them. They were men against the sky, a portent for their age. I wish I could conclude on the symbol pure, but it is an unhappy fact that what was pure on the summit became soiled all too soon below the snowline. After their initial rejoicing at their joint conquest of nature's last frontier, East and West fell to quarreling about who reached the summit first. To mountain climbers, dependent for their very lives upon each other, this was nonsense, and Hillary and Tenzing felt obliged to sign a statement saying "We reached the top almost together." It will be together that East and West reach the top of whatever civilization is coming. May they find the climb more exhilarating than the quarrel.



## EAST-WEST DIALOGUE

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### 3 M. G. BHATE

ONLY the other day, while declaring open the Visvesvaraya Industrial and Technological Museum in Bangalore, the Prime Minister observed that it was essential to combine science and spirituality: "Without science we perish: without spirituality also we perish." That, I believe, is the core theme of the East-West dialogue: while the East is experiencing the truth of the first half of that remark, the West is uncomfortably aware of the significance of the second half. It is really a dialogue, a great debate in which various alternative conceptions of the good life are being examined in the light of the experiences of different societies and individuals. Indian writers are particularly interested in this debate because the Indian mind today is torn and divided by the issues involved.

It is, of course, useful to remember that the characteristically "Western" emphasis on science and technology, the consequent enjoyment of unexampled material prosperity, and the simultaneous growth of the dangers of nuclear war and universal destruction, are very recent developments. For ages and centuries in the past, East and West shared common ways of life and thought, aspiration and achievement. Civilizations and cultures in different societies could be regarded as having attained comparable levels of advancement: differences of tradition and custom could be regarded as differences among equals. In particular, the Indian cultural tradition was a mature and well-developed tradition which gave the Indian mind a sense of poise, self-possession and self-respect. Probably, the consciousness of the value and perfection of that tradition was so strong that it bred a rigidly conservative and orthodox attitude, averse to all change and insisting on a strict, literal conformity. Old was gold, innovation was frowned upon. The

characteristic disapproval of crossing the high seas need only be recalled here.

Today, however, there is a reversal of this situation and the emergence of a threat to the survival of the Indian cultural tradition. The obvious achievements and the felt dominance of the West are so impressive that the East is frantically eager to go to school to the West. The call of the West is compelling.

That is where the universities come in. It is obviously the role of Universities to facilitate critical and balanced study of the humanities and the sciences, of divergent theories, schools and systems of thought developed by different cultural traditions. Free inquiry, informed discussion, exhilarating exchange of thought, can be expected to flourish in the University atmosphere. What Arnold described as "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world, and thus to establish a current of fresh and true ideas" can be taken to be the characteristic activity of a University. Well-planned comparative studies of different Eastern and Western cultures at various stages of their development can be undertaken by Universities in different countries. While the focus of attention in the Universities of a country will naturally be the cultural situation in that country, the widening of the horizons by comparative studies of other cultures will facilitate the learning of the best that is known and thought in the world.

It is relatively easy for the Universities in the Western world to organize such comparative studies of various cultures. The main programme of work in a typical western University consists of a thorough study of various aspects of the Western cultural tradition with special reference to the present and the past of the particular country. For instance, the study of science, literature, philosophy, art and the social sciences in an American University is firmly set in the context of American life and thought: so also, in an English University or a French or a German. Further, the language in which work is carried on in the University is the language of the country, of daily life and of education from the primary

level up to the highest. What is studied, therefore, naturally relates itself to the life of the people and is felt to be a part of the cultural tradition of the country. Advanced work in the natural sciences and the social sciences is at every point seen to grow out of and fertilise national life—economic, political, social, intellectual and spiritual.

Thus firmly rooted in the life of its own country, a Western University can extend its field of study to include other cultures and civilizations. Particularly in recent years, when many countries of the West are enjoying the benefits of the “affluent society”, it has become possible for Universities to open new departments—for the study of Chinese and Japanese culture and literature, of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, of oriental languages and social patterns, and so on. Thus, the Association for Asian Studies in America is sponsored by a group of American Universities which have organized a number of study and research projects and other activities bearing on Asian cultures. The Journal of the Association bears eloquent testimony to the work being done at several universities in the field of Asian Studies. In his Presidential Address at the tenth annual meeting of the Association in 1958, Dr. Hugh Borton gave expression to a conviction that Asia now has a major influence on the American cultural pattern: “we must remain firm in our belief in maintaining that America has not reached the ultimate boundary of its thought and knowledge and that one way to remain intellectually flexible is to place our ideas in juxtaposition to those of other cultures such as those of Asia.” (*The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XVIII No. 1, November 1958, P. 60)

One can get some idea of the kind of work in Asian Studies being done in several American Universities by looking at the programme of courses and research offered at the University of California. The Institute of International Studies which coordinates research work in the University has organized Centres for Chinese, Japanese, South Asia and Southeast Asia studies. Typical research projects are the current Chinese Language Project, Mongolian Dictionary Project, the Emperor Myth in Japan study, Indian Press Digest Project, Dravidian Etymological



Dictionary Project, Caste in India and the United States Study, Conquest of Violence — the Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict Study, and so on. Regular courses of study include Japanese Civilization, Islamic Civilization, History of India, Culture Problems of India, Studies in Ancient Chinese Literature and many more, nearly 300 of them. Study of ancient history and culture balances that of contemporary cultural patterns and problems. A similar awareness of the need for balance has led the London School of Oriental and African Studies of the London University to open new departments of economic, political and social studies. The Director of the School, Professor C. H. Philips, said that the new developments would adjust the lack of balance "which exists in the high degree of attention we have paid to the Asian classical past compared with the slight regard for the living present."

The Universities of the Western world are thus showing their increasing awareness of the importance of studying Asian cultures which express values, attitudes and patterns of living different from those of the West. Sounder knowledge is bound to lead to better understanding and to facilitate international cooperation.

The situation in Indian Universities is somewhat peculiar. Owing to historical and political reasons, Indian Universities started as centres of "modern education," giving pride of place to Western Studies and, by and large, they still continue to give the same preponderance to Western studies. As the English language is the medium of study and instruction, the superiority of English and Western Culture is consciously or unconsciously accepted as self-evident. In fact, the fresher who has left his School (where an Indian language—usually his mother-tongue—was the medium of study) and has joined a College has it forcefully impressed on him that Indian languages are quite inadequate for the purposes of higher education, baby-clothes to be discarded if he seeks intellectual manhood. The courses of study which he takes up, in the humanities or in the sciences, are not firmly set in the context of Indian life and thought: their relevance to the eastern cultural tradition and values, specifically, to Indian experience and

problems, is not always apparent. Most of the text-books used are those current in English or American Universities and are, naturally, relevant to the English or American context. The over-all impression is one of the overwhelming and unquestioned excellence of Western Culture: natural sciences, social sciences, literatures, arts and the application of these to life.

One aspect of this state of affairs is the almost complete absence of systematic study of other eastern cultures, such as the Chinese, the Japanese and the Burmese, in Indian Universities. Of course, the poor and inadequate resources of most of them would in any case prevent them from doing much, but the point to be noted is the general lack of interest in these studies, as contrasted with the eager and intense activity in the study of Western Culture. By and large, the image of the India of tomorrow which is cherished in University campuses is an image cast in the Western mould. Big factories, mechanised farms, large urban centres of population, high and rising standards of life: these insignia of Western societies are very much admired and desired. By contrast, hardly anything in the traditional Indian culture evokes admiration or pride. It is often felt to be a liability rather than an asset.

There seems to be an urgent need, therefore, to make a thorough study and a critical assessment of the several aspects of traditional Indian culture which still control the life and thought of most Indians. The past still lives in India—the bullock cart civilisation still dominates life in most Indian villages. The Indian Universities are, of course, aware of it all: life will not allow them entirely to forget their proper context. But the preoccupation with the study of Western culture and the demands it makes on their time and resources inevitably result in upsetting the natural balance between native and foreign. What is needed is dispassionate and thorough study, which will render impossible both an uncritical acceptance of the West and an uncritical rejection of the East. If, as a result of such study, the traditional Indian culture is found to be in need of radical modification, the Universities are expected to indicate what can be retained and what must be altered.

There is, thus, an urgent need for a thorough, critical examination of the curricula and programmes of work in our Universities with a view to ensuring that the focus of attention is centred on the Indian cultural tradition and the current cultural situation in and problems of the country. The East-West dialogue will really benefit all the participants when each country is pressed to re-examine its own assumptions, opinions and beliefs in the light of those of the others. In such a process of creative communication, East and West will come to a closer understanding and eventually, perhaps, a union in a world community sharing values, attitudes and patterns of living. Only then will the conflict between science and spirituality be resolved, and the art of happiness, which is a lost art at the moment, will be recovered and will enable man to experience "joy in widest commonalty spread."



## EAST-WEST DIALOGUE

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### 4 ANNADA SANKAR RAY

**M**OST people believe in the duality of East and West but they are vague about the line of demarcation. There is a saying current in England that the East begins after Vienna. I myself remember having had such a feeling as I left Vienna for Budapest.

A few years ago a Hungarian writer told us at the International P.E.N. Congress in Tokyo that in his country the choice between East and West had been a fundamental problem for more than a thousand years. The great poet, Emre Ady, "in whom the Hungarian spirit was almost perfectly personified, was torn all his life between East and West." What could this mean if Hungary was definitely in Europe? How did it square with the fact that Greece was even further to the East? Was not Greece the cradle of Western civilization?

The answer to this riddle is that the words "East" and "West" have borne different meanings at different times. A thousand years ago Western Europe looked to Rome for spiritual and cultural leadership. Greece was then a benighted part of an Eastern Europe which looked up to Constantinople, seat of the Eastern Empire and of the Eastern Church. After the Renaissance the intellectuals and artists of Western Europe turned their eyes to ancient Greece and forged a link between themselves and the Hellenes. Though Greece itself remained tied to the East under the Turks, its spirit conquered the whole of Western Europe and America as well. It was paradoxical that its progress was almost entirely westwards. Hungary came under the Austrian Emperor and the Roman Catholic Church. It thus became a part of the West. Yet its Eastern affiliations persisted. The Magyars were originally an Oriental race. In our own times the terms

"East" and "West" have been given an ideological connotation. The new "East" begins after Berlin, after West Berlin.

The line of demarcation is thus seen to be not exactly geographical. Vienna formerly occupied the place that Berlin occupies today. The Turks laid siege to Vienna after conquering Hungary. Europe, meanwhile, had been lifted out of the Medieval Ages by the Renaissance. "East" and "West" had come to mean Medieval and Modern. The Turks withdrew. Hungary was also brought under the influence of the Renaissance. Naturally the Hungarian *avant-garde* was torn between the Medieval and the Modern, East and West. The common people were unaffected because their adherence to the Christian religion was firm and deep. But they too became involved when the new scientific knowledge was applied to industry. The Industrial Revolution, starting in England, gradually spread everywhere. The French Revolution also had repercussions all over Europe. The modern Western man is modern in so far as he is the product of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Industrial and the French Revolutions, and Western in so far as he maintains a continuity with his Christian, Roman and Greek past. For him modernisation is in harmony with westernisation. For others, true westernisation is impossible. This should not stand in the way of true modernisation. Those who, in order to be modern, attempt to be Western, fail and blame their failure on modernism. The Eastern element in their make-up is at odds with the modern. It is difficult to establish a harmonious relationship between the two. In choosing to be Eastern they find it hard to be modern.

Western Europe was the first to modernise itself. For a long time it was the only part of the world that was modern, along with America. Then Peter the Great took the heroic decision to modernise Russia. Modernisation inevitably spelt Westernisation. This gave rise to an inner resistance in the minds and hearts of the Russians. They had been devout followers of the Orthodox Christian Church and their outlook was Eastern. Having one foot in Europe and the other in Asia they owed no allegiance to the West, exclusive or otherwise. While the *avant-garde* wished to line

up with the Germans, the French and the English, the people held fast to their ancestral moorings. The intellectuals felt doubly isolated: from their own countrymen in the first instance and from the main current of modernism in the second. This main current flowed very far away along the banks of the Seine or the Thames. With the rise of Nationalism it became highly unpatriotic to follow the lead of Western Europe. Russians referred to it simply as "Europe". Neither Tolstoy nor Dostoievsky was impressed by the achievements of the modern Western civilisation. "What will it profit a nation if it gains the whole world but loses its own soul?"

Goethe's Faust entered into a bargain with the Devil in order that he might know the secrets of nature, satisfy all his natural cravings, master his environment and his fate. No one can understand the modern West who does not understand Faust. He strove tirelessly to become a sort of Man Almighty, hoping to cheat the Devil of his due and escape with his soul intact by refusing ever to rest:

"All heights and depths my mind shall compass single;  
All weal and woe within my breast shall mingle;  
Till my own self to mankind's self expanded,  
Like it at last upon Time's reef be stranded."

Nor can anyone who does not understand the meaning of the word "amoral" comprehend modern Western art and science. It is easy to confuse it with "immoral" and condemn it out of hand. Tolstoy was revolted by what passed for the modern and the civilised in the West. On the other hand, Turgenev was a European by choice. There were others who were torn between the two opposite poles. They believed that there was something in Romanticism, Realism, Symbolism, Futurism and other movements in art. But this did not mean that they abstracted themselves from the soil or the soul of Russia. They also believed that there was something in Socialism, Communism, Anarchism, Liberalism and other ideologies current in the West though they did not want Russia to be a replica of "Europe". Balancing themselves precariously upon a tight rope, intellectuals like Tchekhov were sick at heart. They could not be full-blooded modern Western men without doing violence



to their deeply-rooted Russian selves. Nor could they be full-blooded Russian patriots without circumscribing their intellectual and aesthetic horizons. For Russia was not and could not be culturally self-sufficient.

The Revolution simplified many things but the old problem of Tchekhov's time continued to worry intellectuals. Pasternak was by no means the first or the last sufferer. Gorky also suffered. Lenin himself might have suffered too, for he was a European as well as a Russian and strove to balance the two. For Stalin and his following no such problem existed. Theirs was a self-contained world which revolved around Moscow, their Mecca. Any who looked elsewhere to enlarge or brush up their knowledge of either reality or art were infidels and regarded as a menace to the faithful.

Modernism was introduced into Japan by the Emperor Meiji. After the first flush of enthusiasm second thoughts came because Japan did not like the idea of being drawn out of herself to become a satellite of movements the main stream of which flowed thousands of miles away in the West. It was only by looking backwards that she could maintain her self-respect. For her, pastwards was the same thing as eastwards. Her *avant-garde* was torn between East and West. Having already striven to align itself with the West, Japan could not stage a retreat without doing violence to its aspirations and convictions. But patriotism set the course, for in Japan patriotism was supreme. And the Japanese had their own ideas about beauty, a cult almost religious in character. Japanese writers, by turning their backs on the West and plunging into the past of the East, considered that they had achieved their "Renaissance". That was in the third decade of this century while the militarists were trying to conquer China. The Second World War followed, bringing defeat and disillusionment. Once again East and West came in conflict and they were torn between them. They are so torn even today.

In Russia and Japan the leaders of the people were their rulers. They chose for them and their choices were confirmed or refuted by public opinion. In India the British were the rulers. They were reluctant to modernise India.

The initiative was taken by Indian intellectuals who, with sympathetic English friends, started educational institutions in Calcutta which taught modern subjects through English. The orthodox, both Hindu and Muslim, continued to advocate education through Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian, as had been the practice down to that time. The rulers did not wish to antagonise them. Public opinion was not ripe for a total change-over for more than a decade. The traditionalists and the modernists were equally divided when the matter was put to the vote in a committee. Macaulay tipped the scales on the side of the innovators by his casting vote. Government took up the new system of education. This system gave the Indian "vernaculars" a place. The "vernaculars" had had no place beyond the primary stage in the old system. Thus it was that Bengali sailed in the same boat as English. Instead of becoming enemies they became allies.

The result was a renaissance of literatures that were stagnating. The new writers were men from the new colleges and schools, men educated in English, not Sanskritists or Persian scholars. These new writers wrote in the "vernacular" languages like their predecessors but there was an important difference. Their minds were modern, equipped with a knowledge of English literature, modern science and history, modern philosophy. They had to struggle with languages overloaded with Sanskrit and Persian, languages that had become heavy and had lost pliancy. The language of poetry and prose and drama was refashioned by these young men. A whole new class of readers was created, readers whose eyes and ears and minds were open to what was happening in the world at large and were eager for the newest ideas, for information about the latest discoveries. Their attachment to their country and its past was in no way diminished but they had acquired a new agility of mind which enabled them to think for themselves, demand and inaugurate beneficial changes in society and religion. This Indian "Renaissance" was followed in due course by what we may call our "Reformation". While the rulers were reshaping the administrative and economic organisation of the country, bringing these more into line with their own

needs, the writers and reformers were busily resuscitating an ancient civilisation by the introduction of modern Western ideas and meeting the challenge these brought. These ideas were not imposed upon them from above or thrust upon them from outside.

What had happened in Russia and Japan now happened in India. The rising tide of nationalism came in conflict first of all with the ruling class, then with their civilisation and culture and finally with the very foundations of modernism. For India to look Westwards for anything came to be intolerable. Eyes and ears were turned homewards and pastwards. If India lacked anything essential to greatness she could not have survived so many centuries with her civilisation intact. She could be as self-sufficient after the departure of the British rulers as she had been before their arrival. So the arguments ran. In order to recover her self-sufficiency India sought to return to her indigenous, simple way of life, to the primary values of existence. The power of the foreign rulers would vanish when the people no longer depended upon their administration for their security, when there was no longer any market for their goods, when their cultural gifts were no longer found acceptable. Self-sufficiency would carry the country half the way to independence, and self-sufficiency should begin with cultural matters. Cultural independence became more important than cultural co-operation and enlightenment. Men like Gandhi wished to establish India's dignity and build up her self-confidence on this foundation.

Gandhi would have rebelled against the importation of modern Western materialism into India even if India, like Japan and Russia, had had an independent government of her own in the latter part of the nineteenth century. His opposition, like Tolstoy's, was fundamental though friendly. He saw little good in the doctrine of progress if it did not add an inch to the moral stature of men. The amoral attitude of scientists and artists in the modern West was a red rag to their own Christian compatriots. How could it be anything else to other people, people with a different spiritual bias, an older and deeper one? The brilliant achievements of Faustian man did not impress all of the leaders



of the Indian Renaissance. Some of them turned eastwards and pastwards. A book by Zola fell into the hands of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. He was so shocked he advised his countrymen to have nothing at all to do with Western literature in general. Science? Yes. He agreed that in scientific matters they had much to learn from the West. Art? No. They should not follow Western masters. They could profit more from a study of Sanskrit dramatists and poets. Time appeared to stand still in India but Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's advice was not taken seriously. Normal human beings are more interested in their own times and their foreign contemporaries than in the past.

Seventy or eighty years have passed since then and India is now independent. The old political conflict has been resolved. Old attitudes linger. Our artists and intellectuals are still torn between classical Sanskrit, a language which stopped growing centuries ago, and modern English and French, languages which have grown progressively freer and more flexible since the Renaissance. Hardly a decade has passed in the West during which some writers and artists have not come into conflict with the Church or the State or the public or vested interests and suffered for what was, for them, the truth. Reality today is not the reality of two thousand years ago. If we are to keep pace with today we have to keep in step with our colleagues in the West. To turn our backs on them and look pastwards is not the way to create modern Hindi or modern Bengali literature. "Past" and "East" have become interchangeable terms. This East-Past complex must be exorcised if we are to have clear and correct thinking. Though national Independence has been won, the battle for individual freedom continues. Writers and artists are not yet free to express their hearts and minds untrammelled by a dead past. This is not to say that we do not wish to maintain continuity with the past. Let there be continuity. Continuity does not imply blind or senseless conformity.

Neither the East nor the West can be sufficient unto itself. Not even in the days of the Sanskrit dramatists and poets was this true. An Indo-Greek king, with his capital at Taxila, ruled within the borders of India, a king named Antialkidas. Heliodoros, his envoy, dedicated a monolithic

column at Besnagar to the honour of Vasudeva, whose devotee he professed himself to be. Greek influence has been traced in ancient China also. The East need not be ashamed to owe anything to the West. It repaid all debts with its gift of Christianity.

East may be East and West may be West but it is a tall order to declare that "never the twain shall meet". Even Hitler used the word "Aryan", though he denied racial affiliation with the common Indo-Aryan stock. Did he not take his swastika from India? In fairness to Kipling it must be remembered that he did not end his poem with "never the twain shall meet". He went on:

"But there is neither West nor East  
Nor border nor breed nor birth,  
When two strong men meet face to face,  
Though they come from the ends of the earth."

Whatever might have been true in the past, the age in which we live is an intact whole, indivisible. The world is growing more and more unified in spite of nuclear weapons or because of them. Archaic ideas of self-sufficiency must be revised to fit the circumstances. A common awareness of the human heritage we all share irrespective of labels such as "Greek" or "Indian" or "British", is a necessity. It is not that these labels are wrong. But the lamp that lights a corner of a room illumines the whole of it. Light itself is shared by all. To shut it out is to be perversely and wilfully blind. There can be no objection to the use of a Greek or Indian or British lamp. But the light itself cannot be labelled. And there should be no shutting out of it even though our dearly cherished notions of truth or goodness or beauty are shown to be not what we thought them. If the light is not genuine, if it is a passing glow, it will vanish like a will-o-the-wisp. Many such emanations have appeared and disappeared without causing much damage. Notions we cherish may not be right for all time. It may be found necessary to sacrifice them without regard for the consequences. And this applies to the West as well as to the East. No special virtue is attached to the mere fact of being Western. Leadership goes to the person who is the closest to Reality and has the clearest vision of Order.

## EAST-WEST DIALOGUE

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### 5 MULK RAJ ANAND

**T**HE PARADOX of our age is that though our world is today more intimately connected together through science, it is more bitterly divided through the various cultures.

Actually, there is one human culture, because there is one humanity. But the recognition of this fact has been hampered in the past through the geographical, social and historical divisions created by man's indifferent control over his environment. These divisions seemed in our century to be disappearing through the increasing command over space by the aeroplane which has shortened the long distances. Unfortunately, this advance in the technique of physical communication was not accompanied by the breaking of national frontiers. In fact the division among men and continents and cultures was intensified by the cold war. And thus the hopes for the unity of mankind, and its culture, have remained unfulfilled.

Also, there have been lingering fears in the minds of many people that this unity of humanity might result in uniformity in its culture, until the stage has been reached that the East and the West confront each other as rivals and enemies, even though they amass similar weapons, produced by science, to destroy each other.

The hopes of those who have earnestly wished for mutual understanding between people seem to become pious wishes. And the menace of virtual extinction of the human race threatens the innocent and guilty alike.

At this juncture, therefore, it is necessary to intensify all those efforts at mutual aid which may check the forces of mutual menace and result in the catharsis of understanding, of human sympathy.

The urge for creative writing seems always to have arisen from the need for communication of intense individual



experience of the universe. The writer has always tried to say: "Look, I have glimpsed a new truth." Or he has exclaimed: "Listen, I have found a new kind of feeling!" Or he has proclaimed: "I know what men should do!".

In all these statements communication is employed, whether overtly, by implication, or by suggestion. At its deepest, by inspiration or by suggestion. At its deepest, the inspiration which compels the writer to express himself makes the words he uses into rhythmic speech, conferring the freedom he has achieved himself onto other people, thus making the languages he uses into literature. At any rate, the whole process entails communication, whether it is monologue or dialogue.

The natural diversity of speech, dialect and language has often been conquered by the translation of literature from one language to another in all the past ages. And this has led to the enriching of the experience of the various parts of humanity, through the translation of the highest and subtlest truths of one people to another. It was almost as though the urge to communicate within one language group has always been equally ardently present as the urge for the translation of the truths of one language group to another language group.

If this fundamental desire to translate has been there in the past periods, when the equipment of man for this task was comparatively inadequate, then how is it that in an age when we have the printing press, paper and all the techniques for easier communication, the translation of literary works from one language to another is not commensurate with the urge for mutual understanding, esteem and illumination.

The answer to this question may lie partly in the fact that our time has witnessed the release of many people towards freedom as individuals and there are too many voices clamouring to be heard. Or the reason for the failure of increased translation from one language to another may be the prejudices, or the divisions, created by the different political systems. Or, our lapses may be due to the lack of discrimination between the good literature and the bad, occasioned by the tremendous weight of commercialism in

book-production under which the most sensitive, the most intense and the most thoughtful literature, remain buried.

I shall try to notice the obstacles to translations of good books from one language into another, offered by the three kinds of hindrances I have referred to above. And I hope that, in this way, some of the debris may be cleared and the several paths leading towards the common road of the survival of mankind may be illuminated. I would like to add that what I put down below are certain tentative generalisations not meant, in any sense, to be the assertions of dogma, but merely as possible basis for discussion.

There is no doubt that during the last twenty years the mutual translations of literary, scientific and cultural works among the nations of Europe and America, have vastly increased. There are few classical authors in any language of the west who are not to be found in other languages. And even the works of the contemporary writers are taken up in various languages as soon as they are published in one language. In many ways, then, the community of western professional writers shares many values together, inspite of the diversity of belief and opinion. Also the various languages of this part of the world have enriched each other, taking metaphor and image from one local culture into another. The isolation has been broken down and there are not many groups of people who are totally absent from literature. Of course, there are still some suppressed groups and individuals whose voices are not heard, because the dominant, ruling groups, while conceding democratic rights, do not allow cultural autonomy to certain nationalities, groups and individuals. The writers of Gaelic, Welsh, and Scottish languages have seldom found expression in the accepted literature. All the same, the struggle of these suppressed languages and literatures are noticeable, and movements exist for the translation of works from these languages. The measure of the success of translation in the West is that, even the Icelandic language, which is spoken by only one million people, has succeeded in accepting most of the important books of Europe into itself, if it has not already given its own good books to all the sister languages.

This encouraging exchange of the treasures of the various

individuals, nations and people of Europe would have offered the hope that the significant works in the languages of Asia and Africa would also be translated into the West, as indeed, some of the books of the West have been rendered into the languages of Asia and Africa.

Unfortunately, this exchange has been thwarted by the fact that, for over five hundred years, the West has dominated the East and denigrated its cultures.

And now, when many more suppressed and oppressed people of the two great continents of Asia and Africa, have attained liberty, and the remaining colonial countries are in the process of achieving freedom, the possibilities of exchange have increased and the previous reactionary attitude of the West is disappearing.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that while some of the ancient and classical works from the languages of Asia and Africa are to be found in the languages of the West and vice versa, the contemporary works of the old-new continents have not gone into the languages of Europe and America.

The UNESCO has tried in recent years, to redress the imbalance. But, naturally, the resources of world organisation do not permit the expansion of this programme. And the profit and loss account of most Western publishers does not allow them to undertake the risk of putting out before their public the best works of the present-day Asian and African writers. Meanwhile, the commercial nature of publishing in the West enables Europe and America to dump into the Asian and African markets, both in the English and French languages, a vast quantity of cheap and sensational literature even as some Western governments subsidise the translation of indifferent books into the languages of the brown and black continents.

In order, however, to offset these tendencies, it is important that the various writers' organisations should select those old and new books which reflect the spiritual aspirations of the people of Asia and Africa and their dreams of freedom and peace, and encourage the translation of these into the languages of the West. It is necessary to put the emphasis on those books which, in a vital manner, express



the contemporary situation and speak of the resurgence of the new peoples who are about to enter history or have just entered history.

Those who care for the spread of democratic values should also adopt a comprehensive attitude about the books of Asia and Africa, and include in the translation such reinterpretations of history and of social and political doctrines as may be the distinctive contributions of suppressed peoples, even if these reinterpretations are different in their emphasis to those of the dominant groups of the West. And, in this context, the translation of the folklore of the people of Asia and Africa, and their children's literature, should be given special attention, in so far as these two branches of humanities already unite the peoples of the world. The prejudice of the West against those books in which the two continents speak of their peculiar mental, moral and political struggles, should be kept at bay.

No voice of any people or individual, however obscure, should be lost if this voice speaks sensitively and from the highest awareness.

This attitude of liberality which we ask for from the West already exists among many enlightened peoples of Europe and America. But it would be an evasion of the truth if it was not clearly stated that the cold war, which began at the end of the second world holocaust, has created sharp divisions, confusions and disruptions in the whole world.

The main result of the prejudices of the various nation-states of the West has been to arm literature and make it into militant propaganda. And though quite a few countries of Asia and Africa have tried to remain outside the orbit of the cold war, nevertheless the literature of these countries has been divided, on the basis of doctrines which have no relevance to resurgent peoples. Perhaps the new expressions of the urges of the individuals in Asia and Africa are concerned with the essential human values and with truths which spring from the genuine urge to achieve those modest gifts of freedom, shelter, food, covering and inner balances which have been denied to them under alien rule. These life urges have nothing to do with hatred. Instead,

they invoke the old world values of compassion, pity and understanding. The tragic misconception is that the urges of new peoples are considered subversive, and this poisons the atmosphere and makes it difficult for the youngest talents of emergent people to find themselves translated into the West. The only cure for the cancer of suspicion, apprehension and despair, which has entered into literature through the rigours of the cold war, is for the enlightened people of the whole world to cut across the fighting systems and unite on the basis of human values.

The vast hiatus between the expression of the genius of the new peoples of Asia and Africa and the translation of their intense vision into the languages of the West is further increased by the flood unleashed by those in Europe, America, Asia and Africa, who publish books from a monopolistic point of view. The whole attitude of considering books, which should contain wisdom, truth and beauty, as objects from which big profits can be made, vitiates the very intent of literature. No one can gainsay the right of shopkeepers to make an honest living above the cost of business, from the sales of any commodity, but when books become the vehicle for the profit motive, in the most unbridled sense of this word, then they are bound to be vulgarised by the inclusion of those sensations which attract the immature, ungrown up minds of semi-literate peoples who have not come within the realm of good values.

I would like to insist that the damage caused by the books of horror, crime and sex, in our generation is more extreme than the lives built up by good books. The obnoxious strains of violence which dramatise the plots of the cheaper novels have already bred new young men who find an escape from the tedium of the struggle to be individuals in the wanton negation of all that is noble in the heritage of mankind.

The only check against this tendency would be for the writer organisations to help to make a pool of translations of world books as well as to make frequent exchanges of lists of new publications in the languages of the emergent peoples and of the great books of the West. This may, to some extent, obviate the tragedy of the miseducation of

whole peoples and may keep some balance until the educationists introduce into their curricula methods which may prepare the human species, on the basis of enlightenment, for a possible new world, free of apprehension, racial prejudice and mutual menace.

Translations of books, even though always inadequate, specially where poetry is concerned, are the only means of relating the similar private feelings, emotions and thoughts of the human family, specially in the age of division. Science, though already international, relates mostly rational thoughts. Art, because it suggests and does not often give literal meaning, stimulates the rhythmic life. The transformation of one literature into another through words, which convey meaning as well as thought and rhythm, alone can "connect" and integrate human beings.



# HUMOUR ASSAMESE

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By DR. PRAPHULLADATTA GOSWAMI

**H**UMOUR as a type of literature first emerged at the turn of the century in the hands of Lakshminath Bezbarua (d. 1938). Bezbarua had considerable vitality and a reformatory ardour. He realized that at the root of the backwardness of the Assamese was a self-complacent attitude and a sort of vanity which had to be removed before they could come abreast of the times. This realization was instrumental in leading him to create Kripabar Barbarua the Great—a serio-comic synthesis of the virtues and vices of the Assamese grandee. Bezbarua combined in the figure of Kripabar both Pickwick and Dean Swift, and in the innumerable essays that he wrote this serio-comic figure went on sneering and slashing at the foibles of the conservative and the self-complacent. The readers laughed and later perhaps squirmed a little when they came to know that it was they who were being laughed at. In his essay: "The Assamese are a Great People" he explains that the Assamese have all the elements of greatness, such as, patience, "oneness" (there is a play on the word *ekata*, meaning solidarity or unity, but which he interprets as oneness or each for himself). Patience he explains as a virtue of the cow which is ranked equal to the Brahmin. The Assamese are as patient as the cow. . . .

Bezbarua's method looked satirical, but he had such vitality and exuberance and such love for language that he could not resist being facetious and high-spirited. On satire he had a definite view: "In all literature, since the days of Aristophanes, satire has enjoyed a dignified place. I do not know why it should not have such a place in Assamese." This naturally led him to pick on the foibles of men, for example, the vanity of the potter's son who has achieved the status of a high official but ignores his father as a rustic boor, the airs of the poor man turned rich, the attempt of the college educated young man to acquaint his illiterate village wife with the flights of love poetry, the eagerness to read a magazine without any desire to pay the subscription, and so on. His humour is hardly situational; it is

primarily based on character study, and therefore if the type of character he studies becomes outmoded, the humour wears thin. The humour that also combines humanity—a sympathy for others—he does not seem to have. There is an exception however, in that well-known story *Dhowa-khowa* (or *The Hookah*). Like his predecessor Hemchandra Barua, who had written a play on the addiction to opium of a young man of a noble family and his ultimate ruin, Bezbarua described another young man's addiction to tobacco and his ultimate death when the young man jumped into the Brahmaputra to save his hookah. One feels somehow considerable sympathy for this disintegrating personality.

Bezbarua pioneered the short story in the language, but in spite of a humorous flavour in many of his stories the humour of situation is infrequent. The situational humour that is seen in his drama is borrowed mostly from local folktales. He takes a tale and reshapes it into a farce. The numskull or the credulous husband is put in situations which are obviously comic. In the play *Litikai*, for example, seven numskulls after having waged a war on the mosquitoes swim across a ploughed up field considering it to be a sheet of water and find one of them missing, as the counter leaves himself out of the tally. A Brahmin finds them the missing one and out of gratefulness they proffer to serve him as *litikais* or servants. Other incidents follow and the Brahmin and the villagers are fed up with their idiocy.

Bezbarua made a conscious attempt to create a humorous character in his more serious dramatic writing by drawing on Shakespeare. In *Chakraddhwaja Simha*, a historical play, the character Gazpuriya is modelled on Falstaff and is "as fleshy as an elephant, with the belly of a hog, and is a sot." The six scenes which are dominated by Gazpuriya are lively and enjoyable. Some amount of wit is also displayed in these scenes.

I have written of Bezbarua in some detail because he set the tone of modern Assamese humour. There have been other writers with a humorous vein and perhaps with a more refined and intellectual quality of the comic, but none has produced so much work of this nature.

Padmanath Gohain Barua, a contemporary of Bezbarua, wrote plays based on Teton, the trickster of Assamese folktales, and another light play on the superstitious fear of ghosts, but he does not have the exuberant style of his contemporary. On the other hand, his careful use of language and a better sense

of realism resulted in *Gaonburha* (1897), one of the best comedies in the language. A young villager is rounded up by the Gaonburhas or Village Headmen and the police in order to carry some fowl for the Civilian Magistrate. (This forced labour was known as *begar-dhara*). This outrages the pride of the young man and to be able to get rid of such mortification in the future, he persuades the Mauzadar or Revenue Collector to invest him with the position of a Headman. The Headman's functions are to help the Mauzadar in realizing the revenue and in securing without payment food and fowl for the Sahib Magistrate whenever the latter is on tour. The work is arduous, and while he has no time to attend to his family and field, he cannot satisfy the Sahib's underlings. The position of honour that he has in the village assembly does not offset the travails entailed in the honorary status of Village Headman. The young man, Bhogman, and his colleagues, regain peace of mind only after the resignation of their offices. It is a light play dealing with the petty sorrows of petty persons, but everything has been shown with sympathy, and the worries of Bhogman or his wife or even of the Mauzadar have been revealed dramatically. The speeches are realistic, the playwright even imitating the speech-habits of various sections of the people. Human nature and situation combine to make this play enjoyable and memorable. Further, if good humour is a twin-level creation, that is, one laughs at a humorous object or person and at the same time feels sympathy for the object or person, then Bhogman, particularly, is a memorable creation.

An inferior play but exploiting real-life situations as in *Gaonburha* was Durgaprasad Majinder Barua's *Mahari* (1896), a farce in two acts, and depicting the efforts of a young man to secure a living in a tea-garden. The interesting part of the action is laid in the garden. The eccentricities of Mr. Fox, the all-powerful manager, the spicy language of his fisherwoman mistress, and the discomfitures of the young man who has no English, are brought out amusingly.

The thirties saw the short story emerging as a popular and flourishing type of literature, and humour came to be monopolized more by a few short story writers than by playwrights, though recently excellent humour has been seen in Sarada Bardaloi and Krishnananda Bhattacharya's *Magribar Azan*, set in rural surroundings and describing the friendship of two naughty but noble lads, one Hindu and the other Muslim. It is, however, a tragedy of considerable merit. The short story



writers who amused readers most in the thirties were Haliram Deka and Mahichandra Bora. Both were lawyers and their practice perhaps gave them an understanding of certain aspects of human nature.

Deka has a flair for irony and prefers to expose in restrained language the hypocrisy of the social climber. The story *Purva-purush* or Forefathers, for example, describes how the narrator changes his parent-given name, how he takes on new manners, how when his rustic father dies of dysentery he sends news to the papers that Mr. So and So, of such and such antecedents, of such and such virtues has left the world of heart failure and in full consciousness till the last moment.... This is not just a narration, the incidents have been organized around the desire of the narrator to present a better front in society. Bezbarua also was dead set against social hypocrisy, but his technique was crude compared with that of Deka. Deka has also considerable human sympathy and touches lightly on how the unsophisticated mind reacts to certain situations. If the girl's husband turns out to be a drunkard, the relative gives expression to a smile of satisfaction, but if on the other hand the girl's husband reforms and proves to be desirable and beyond reproach, the relative comes and pays the girl's mother a compliment: "Yes, we knew, yours was a lucky daughter. She should certainly secure a good husband."

Mahi Bora's comedy is more easily enjoyable and combines situation and character. His language is serio-comic and his situations are exaggerated. He has a superb command of language, which is flavoured with racy expressions and Sanskrit quotations. At the same time he also exploits names. For example, the low paid Police Sub-Inspector who cringes before his superior and tyrannizes the ignorant villager must be named Darpasingh, his assistant must be named Lambodar: one Lion of Pride and the other The Hanging-bellied. Mahi Bora's objective was to expose corruption, social and political, but he wrote in such an uproarious manner that his ultimate objective seemed to drop out on the way.

In the social and political implications of his stories, Mahi Bora sometimes reminds one of the technique of Wodehouse. His stories have not yet been published in book form.

In the earnest forties the humorous short story seemed to dwindle, though in the fifties it again revived in the hands of a few younger writers. The first major break was seen in Papiya-tara's *Mister Dasar Bhezal Nohowa Katha* or "The

Unadulterated Narration of Mister Das." Now this Mister Das is also a Police Sub-Inspector with the same virtues as Darpasingh. But Papiya-tara's style is not serio-comic. He has observed the techniques of the corrupt official in the police or the education department or of the doctor working in rural areas and recounts them in an amusing manner.

The style is condensed and sometimes cryptic, but achieves its purpose, that of revealing certain types in various situations. Papiya-tara (a pseudonym) wrote only half a dozen stories, for later he turned to the novel.

In recent years two young writers, both college teachers, have acquired some prestige as humorists. They are both successful short story writers. In some of his stories, Mahim Bora evinces a deep humanity and a serious cast of mind. At the same time a story like *Aparazit* or "The Unvanquished", has its effect on two levels, one serious and the other comic. Bhudhar Saikia, who is last seen as the proprietor of the un-flourishing Uncle & Co., Tailoring Shop, does not know what it is to get disheartened. Even the shirt he makes for an unwary victim is seen to have one sleeve shorter than the other. "But it would be of special service. For doing domestic work this would be useful." However, Bhudhar added: 'Pull up both the sleeves, so that people may not notice the difference. I have sewn the whole shirt in a new design. . . . Don't delay in paying me one maund of paddy."

Bhaven Saikia's humour depends on situation, but he has a sense of character and can describe rural life convincingly. His *Kaksha-bhrasta* or "He Missed the Way" describes the discomfitures of a young man who is sent by his mother to his future bride's house with certain presents. He is misled into the wrong house and, as the master of the house is away, he gives a bag containing a blouse piece and some sweets to a shy young girl. He is mentally satisfied that the girl—his bride as he supposes—looks attractive. But when her father arrives he discovers his mistake and departs carrying the empty bag. Saikia builds up the theme with considerable patience, and his language seems to brim with suppressed laughter. In a longish story, *Laz* (Shame), he describes amusingly the embarrassment of a girl who notices a young man looking towards her while she is having her bath. But on a later occasion, when she does not find him looking towards her, she feels piqued. It is an interesting study of a growing girl's mind.

One happy feature in Mahim Bora and Bhaven Saikia's

stories is that they have neither cheap sentiment nor the *My Magazine* type of romance. Bora and Saikia both can look at things in a detached manner. Situational humour has been attempted by the writer of this essay too. His stories are either narrated by two stock characters or describe events happening to them.

The late Hem Barua, a well-known physician, was in his sixties when he began to write a few years ago, but he immediately attracted attention with his inimitable manner of reminiscing, particularly recalling certain types of character he had met either in his school days or in his medical practice. He can describe situations in a pleasant manner, as when he recalls why the magazine his class had started had to be stopped.

Dr. Barua was primarily an essayist, but he also wrote a few excellent short stories, for example, *Zahara* or "The Bastard", where he builds up the theme by piecing together rural gossip from various angles. He has considerable sympathy for the types he describes. His *Bapi*, a rowdy and courageous Muslim school-boy who later takes to business and ultimately dies of jaundice, is a study in loyalty and generosity, narrated amusingly but with feeling and sympathy.

Premnarayan Datta who has specialized in the crime novel has dabbled in social and political satire. He plays on words and exaggerates certain aspects of character. His *Di-ai Sahab* is an amusing satire on a Deputy Inspector of Schools whose philosophy in life seems to be *Di-ai* or *Give me, Please*. This story is one of Premnarayan's best, combining as it does wit and situational humour.

Let me wind up this essay by referring to an autobiography of a nineteenth-century official which has seen the light only the other day. *Harakanta Barua Sadaraminar Atmazibani* covers the period from 1835 to 1890, with a little history and reminiscence which recalls the Burmese invasions of the land in the second decade of the century. The book is a mine of information, administrative, political and social; the writer records events objectively, usually year by year but often day by day. The language is severely controlled, there is no ripple of emotion anywhere, and sometimes the statements are dry as dust. But at several places his very manner of writing has produced excellent humour—the humour of understatement, so rare in Indian literature.

It may be added in conclusion that apart from comedies and farces written by Bezbarua or Gohain Barua or later by



Padmadhar Chaliha and Mitraddev Mahanta, and of course, the short stories, no novel of a comic character has yet been published. Amusing situations or comical types are found in Premnarayan Datta's crime novels, but none of them can be called humorous through and through.

# HUMOUR

## BENGALI

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BY AJIT KUMAR DUTT

**B**ENGALI literature has been divided into three phases, the Early, the Middle and the Modern, according both to time and to distinctive linguistic and literary features.

The end of the middle phase brings us down to Bhāratchandra and Rāmprasad, who flourished in the 18th century at the time of the battle of Plassey. After the battle of Plassey, the traditional narrative verse, which had so long prospered under the patronage of the Nawabs and the Zamindars and has properly been described as Court-poetry, came to an abrupt end. The easy-going life of the rich, educated and cultured people around those courts was replaced by the busy and active life of the people who began to grow rich by serving the British or by trading with them. These new patrons of literature had no time to listen to long narrative poems like those of the Middle period, which were sung continuously for several evenings, and in consequence the old tradition of poetry died out. It was about a century later, when Bengali youth began to receive English education and came under the influence of Western thought and culture, that Modern Bengali Literature came into being. The interval between the disappearance of the old tradition and the advent of the modern outlook was filled by various experiments, mostly crude, and particularly by the productions of a class of versifiers, known as Kaviwāllās who excelled in extempore song-making.

The first notable name in Modern Bengali literature is that of Iswar Gupta who appeared as a poet in the second decade of the 19th century. Iswar Gupta had no opportunity to learn English, but was lucky in having highly educated friends and patrons from whom he acquired many modern ideas. In many respects he was a follower of old traditions, but he formed the link between the old and the new. The newly awakened religious and moral sense found their first expression in Iswar Gupta's verses. He edited a weekly paper named *Sambad Prabhakar*, one of the earliest periodicals in Bengali, through

which he dispensed both news and entertainment. He was however, mainly a versemaker and his verses were notable in form and technique. They were also so full of wit and humour that he has been compared to Pope and Dryden. Among those whose first writings were published in "Sambad Prabhakar" and who received personal encouragement and guidance from Iswar Gupta were Bankim Chatterjee, Dinabandhu Mitra, Manomohan Basu and many others who were in the forefront of the neo-literary movement of the time. Apart from his historical importance, Iswar Gupta enjoys the reputation of being the first real humourist of modern Bengali literature. He found an element of fun in almost every aspect of Bengali life, such as Bengali customs, the Bengali food-habits, the proneness of Bengali women to gossip, in fact in everything that he observed around him. His world, however, was confined to the limits of Bengal and everything Bengali. Patriotic sentiments which had just begun to grow, also found their earliest expression in Iswar Gupta. In a poem, he begged Queen Victoria to protect the peasantry of Bengal from the tyranny of the indigo-planters; for the Bengalis, he said, were only the Queen's tame cattle who had not yet learnt to use their horns. He wrote verses on the mango-fish, a highly coveted delicacy in Bengal, the pineapple, and the goat whose glory, he said, was unparalleled because it provided music at its own destruction; meaning that drums made of goatskin were beaten at the time of goat-sacrifices. Although Iswar Gupta did not delve very deep into the human mind, he had an unlimited fund of wit and humour which make his verses enjoyable even today. He made fun of many eminent persons of his time, but his sallies were so free from malice and spite of any kind that they were never resented.

It was Michael Madhusudan Datta who, apart from being the real originator of modern Bengali poetry, moulded the Bengali drama into its modern form and technique. In addition to his serious drama in which he achieved notable success, Michael wrote two farces, in one of which he ridiculed educated young men of his time for their blind imitation of British ways of life, particularly evident in liquor-drinking and disrespect for all national customs. Michael Datta himself belonged to that young set and knew and depicted their weaknesses perfectly. He wrote another farce attacking immorality, then rampant among the rich land-holders; and these two powerful farces constitute the first modern Bengali plays of mature technique.



Dinabandhu Mitra, a slightly younger contemporary of Michael Datta, earned fame by writing *Nil-Darpan* or the "Indigo-Mirror" which was instrumental in putting an end to the tyranny of the indigo planters. Dinabandhu is considered to be not only the greatest Bengali dramatist of the 19th century but also one of its finest humourists. He had extremely keen powers of observation, a deep knowledge of human nature and a fund of unlimited humour which enabled him to write a number of farces of great merit. In his *Sadhabhar Ekadashi* he drew a caricature of a talented Bengali youth, highly educated and brilliant in conversation, whose life is ruined by an unquenchable addiction to drink. In order to keep himself provided with liquor, he corrupts sons of rich men and sponges on them. He himself is fully conscious of his degradation and in sober moments laments his lapses, and this supplies a streak of pathos in this otherwise hilarious character. Many critics consider this farce to be one of the finest in Bengali literature, and it was successfully staged by the late Sisir Kumar Bhaduri in comparatively recent times.

At this time many other poets wrote humorous verses in the tradition of Iswar Gupta, among whom mention may be made of Hem Chandra Bandopadhyaya, the celebrated author of *Britra-Samhar*, whose satirical verses, although somewhat topical and dated, earned much contemporary popularity. Dwijendra Nath Tagore, the eldest brother of Rabindranath, also wrote very fine humorous verse.

Prose as a vehicle of literature was practically non-existent before the British missionaries set up a printing press in Serampore and began to employ Pundits for translating the Bible and for writing Bengali text-books for British civilians. A notable prose writer and humourist of those early times was Bhabani Charan Bandopadhyaya, a contemporary of Raja Ram Mohan Ray. He edited a periodical *Samachar Chandrika*, in which he published several unsigned prose pieces containing highly interesting caricatures of contemporary society. He also wrote a few books, of which *Naba Babu Bilas* depicting the new Calcutta *babu* in his true light, is outstanding. This book cannot properly be called a novel, but is as near an approach to it as was possible at that time.

The next name in prose literature is that of Peary Chand Mitra. He wrote the famous *Alaler Gharer Dulal* under the pseudonym of Tekchand Thakur. In spite of many imperfections, this book is considered to be the first novel in Bengali. It is a

satire of great merit and some of the characters drawn by the author are absolutely authentic and true to life. Peary Chand Mitra was one of the English educated reformers of those times and in *Alaler Gharer Dulal* he wanted to show the bitter consequences of drinking and other social vices, then prevalent among sons of rich men. The humour of Peary Chand, or Tekchand as he is better known, is of a high order, and Bankim Chandra has admitted his own indebtedness to Tekchand in many respects. Another contemporary prose writer of merit was Kaliprasanna Sinha, a rich landlord of Calcutta who, before he died at the age of 30, had already made his mark as a writer of outstanding ability, as well as a patron of learning. He wrote a number of satirical sketches which he collected in a volume entitled *Hutom Panchar Naksha* (Sketches of an Owl).

We now come to Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, who was the first architect of the modern Bengali novel. Bankim Chandra was not merely a novelist or a critic, he was also a reformer, a leader of thought and, in fact, an embodiment of everything that was progressive in Bengali life and society. He brought out a monthly, named *Bangadarshan*, of which most of the pages had to be filled by himself for want of contributions of a sufficiently high standard. He had not only to set up a standard of editing, but also to create a class of readers who could appreciate higher literary standards. In order to attract readers and subscribers, Bankim Chandra at first began to write a series of humorous pieces in his periodical in which he made fun of various weaknesses and drawbacks in the Bengali life of those times. These sketches were later collected in a book entitled *Lokarahasya* (Fun for the People). He seems however to have tired of this sort of comic writing and created *Kamalakanta* a highly educated opium-eating character on the model of De Quincey's English Opium Eater. In *Kamalakanta*, Bankimchandra extended, as it were, his own personality, and speaking as if under the influence of opium, he presented the contemporary Bengali society in a new light, which enabled the reader to look at himself in the proper perspective. The book was a great success, in as much as it combined excellent humour with serious thought and sharp observation of various aspects of Bengali life. Many critics including Bankim Chandra himself, considered this to be his greatest work.

After Bankim Chandra, and as a result of his influence, the standard of humour in Bengali literature improved to a very great extent. Of Bankim's contemporaries, Indranath Bando-

padhaya first established his literary reputation by writing two satires in verse and later wrote some satirical novels. He was, however, primarily a journalist and wrote a humorous column in a Bengali weekly under the pen name "Panchananda" by which name he came to be widely known. Another prose writer of this time, Akshoy Chandra Sarkar, was a journalist who never missed an opportunity to introduce some humour in his writings. His humorous articles were posthumously collected by his son in two volumes entitled *Motikumari* and *Rupak O Rahasya*.

By this time humour, which had been confined to writings which were entirely comical or satirical, began to find a place in serious literature, such as novels and stories. (Bankim Chandra himself introduced some humour in his novels, and although he was not very successful in this respect, he showed to later writers the way to enliven serious writings with touches of humour here and there.) Thus we find Taraknath Gangopadhyaya in his novel *Swarnalata*, introducing a character Ramkamal, who evokes as much humour as pathos and is considered an outstanding creation.

A notable humourist and one of the greatest satirists in Bengali literature was Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyaya who, although a slightly younger contemporary of Bankimchandra, did not begin to write until he was over forty. In his boyhood he suffered extreme poverty and experienced the pangs of hunger and starvation for days at a time. He had no proper schooling but educated himself to such an extent that the Government sought his advice in many matters. (Including geology, chemistry, biology, botany as well as agriculture and industry of the land.) The great suffering he underwent in his youth and the inhuman social tyranny he saw around him, made him a true lover of humanity and a rebel whenever he found religious and social customs interfering with human happiness. It was religious and social tyranny as set against human suffering that inspired him to write a number of highly humorous phantasies in which lower animals including elephants, tigers, frogs and even mosquitoes played conspicuous parts. He wrote a large number of ghost stories, dealing with not the modern and subtle ghost of the spiritualist, but the old-fashioned naughty kind, who delighted in haunting human homes and causing as much suffering to living human beings as they could. In depicting the activities of his ghosts, Trailokyanath portrayed the heartless tyranny of the guardians of society



and social customs. He put forward the theory that in order to succeed in life, one should try to get the help of ghosts who are all-powerful on earth. He therefore suggested that as ghosts are creatures of darkness, it might be possible to manufacture ghosts on a large scale by condensing darkness.

The greatness of Trailokyanath was not realised by his contemporaries, for on the surface his writings appeared to be crude phantasies. It is only in the twentieth century that critics discovered the real value of his works, and today he occupies a very high position as a humourist and satirist in Bengali literature.

In drama, Dinabandhu Mitra was followed by Jyotirindranath Tagore, an elder brother of Rabindranath Tagore, who introduced the romantic and historical drama in Bengali literature. It was on the model of Jyotirindranath's dramas that Girish Chandra Ghosh, the famous actor-dramatist, began to write his romantic historical plays. Besides writing a few original plays and farces, Jyotirindranath translated a large number of Sanskrit, English and French plays from the original and wrote a few farces of outstanding merit. He was well-versed in French literature and was a great admirer of Moliere, some of whose plays he translated into Bengali. Of his farces, *Aleek Babu* is full of the raciest kind of humour and is frequently staged even today.

The next actor-dramatist of repute was Amritlal Basu, who gained so much popularity that he became known as "Rasaraj" or the king of humour. Although Amritlal's farces were very successful on the stage they are poor as literature and not very enjoyable in print. To the modern taste, they are apt to seem rather gross, or at least not of a very refined or remarkable order. After Jyotirindranath, in fact, a gulf, had appeared between the educated, cultured and literary people and the theatrical world. In consequence, only actors wrote plays for the stage, and most good literateurs considered it beneath their dignity to be associated with it.

We come now to Rabindranath Tagore whose genius reached out to almost every branch of literature, including poetry, drama, short-story, novel, essay and serious dissertation. Tagore possessed a great fund of wit and humour so that he was able to enliven even his serious writings with witty comments and humorous analogies. He wrote a large number of humorous verses, including a poetical play named *Lakshmir Pariksha* (Test of the Goddess Lakshmi), which, written for young girls, is a

masterpiece of wit and humour. In his late years he also published a book, *Prahasini*, composed entirely of humorous or satirical verses.

In his two essays on *Kautukhāsyā* and *Kautukhāsyer Mātrā* ('Humour' and 'Limits of Humour'), Tagore is regarded as having set the standard and defined the limits of literary humour in Bengali. In his early years he published two humorous books, *Hāsyā-Kautuk* and *Byānga-Kautuk*, containing short, dramatic humorous pieces, meant for the young, but equally enjoyable to adults. As is well-known, he wrote a number of plays and farces which were at first staged and acted by members of his own family, for he had no contact with the professional stage. The humour of Rabindranath is inseparably mixed with wit, and arises primarily out of situations which are then utilised for fun with verbal witticisms of the liveliest kind. Tagore also wrote a book of nonsense verse, *Khapchara*, and two volumes of nonsense stories, entitled *She* and *Galpa-Salpa*; but in nonsense writing his achievement was not as great as that of Sukumar Ray of whom we will speak presently.

Of the contemporaries of Rabindranath Tagore, none excelled Dwijendralal Roy in humour; the centenary of this writer will be celebrated in 1963. He is very well known as a dramatist, and his patriotic historical plays, when they were brought out in rapid succession, captured the imagination of the contemporary public. He, too, had no contact with the public stage, and technically his drama has many faults. He also wrote a number of farces, which were popular. His reputation as a humourist, however, rests on his humorous verses. Dwijendralal started his literary career by publishing two volumes of serious poems, followed by a volume of satirical verses in the manner of the Ingoldsby Legends of Richard Harris Burham. These verses he published in a volume entitled *Asahrhe* (Phantasies) which was highly praised by Tagore. In these verses Dwijendralal introduced a great deal of fun, but his real masterpiece in humour was his later publication *Hashir Gan* (Songs of Laughter). Although put to music by their author, the songs are eminently readable as poems.

As I have already mentioned humour at this time began to appear profusely in our literature and many writers showed considerable talent in it. Of them, Kedarnath Banerjee, who was born in the same year as Dwijendralal, but started to write very late in life, shone as a versifier and a novelist. He made his appearance in literature with a book of comic verse entitled

*Kashir Kinchit* (Tit-bits of Banaras), in which he described the funny side of Banaras and its people. Later he wrote a number of humorous novels and stories entitled *I has, Amra Ki O Ke* (Who and What Are We?), *Kosthir Falāfal* (The Indications of the Horoscope) etc. In all these he brought out the latent humour in the drab existence of the lower middle class. He enjoyed great popularity in his life-time and was endearingly called *Dadu* (grandfather) by all his admirers. In non-fictional humorous prose of this time, Lalit Kumar Banerjee, a Professor in the Calcutta Bangabasi College, earned much fame and popularity. Pramatha Chaudhuri, the celebrated stylist and editor of "Sabuj Patra" was another who, although a serious writer, enlivened all his writings with humour and wit at every step. He also wrote some excellent sonnets and other verse, but whether in prose or verse his ability to produce humour by verbal dexterity makes him thoroughly enjoyable. Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee, an eminent story-writer of that time, was able to introduce a great deal of humour in his stories which arose out of cleverly conceived situations. Another name in this field of writing is that of Abanindra Nath Tagore, the great exponent of Indian Art, who wrote fantasies of unparalleled beauty. His humour is so subtle and satisfying to the reader that critics consider him to be as great in literature as he was in painting.

The eighties of the 19th century saw the birth of many outstanding literary figures some of whom may be regarded as the greatest humourists Bengal has so far produced. Among them the name of Rajsekhar Basu, who died in 1960 at the age of eighty, and that of Sukumar Ray who died at the age of 45, stand out. Rajsekhar Basu was a scientist, and nobody suspected his literary talents until, at the age of 42, he suddenly appeared as a story-teller with a first-rate humorous story entitled *Sri Sri Siddheswari Ltd.* This story, appearing in a monthly magazine under the pseudonym "Parasuram" so astonished and delighted the literary world that everybody urged Rajsekhar to write more, and he continued to write remarkable stories of that class throughout his remaining years. During these years, Rajsekhar published no fewer than ten volumes of humorous stories, beside doing a great deal of serious literary work. The real merit of Rajsekhar's stories is that all his characters are familiar to us, but he presents them in such a light that their activities are revealed to be extremely ridiculous. Although the comic element in Rajsekhar's stories



overwhelms the reader, most of them, particularly his later stories, should really be regarded as excellent satires. In this he resembles Trailokyanath Mukherjee, by whom he seems to have been influenced.

We next come to Satyendranath Datta, who was one of the most popular poets of his time. He too possessed a strong sense of humour and wrote a number of comic verses, which he later collected in a volume entitled "Hasantika". However, he made fun mostly of contemporary events, which being topical in nature, have lost much of their appeal.

Now we come to Sukumar Ray, the father of the celebrated film-maker Satyajit Ray, who wrote mainly for children; but today it would be difficult to find an educated man of any age in Bengal whose memory does not retain a large assortment of Sukumar Ray's verses. Apparently he wrote only nonsense verses, but there is such a substratum of deeper sense underlying these, that there is hardly any aspect of life in contemplating which one is not automatically reminded of Sukumar Ray's verses. These verses are not satirical but are permeated by pure humour of the highest quality. They have been collected in two volumes, entitled *Abol Tabol* and *Khai Khai*. Sukumar Ray also wrote a nonsensical phantasy named *Hajabarala* and a number of stories about the exploits of a school boy, who can be ranked beside Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. His phantasy does not compare unfavourably with Lewis Carroll's. Rajsekhar Basu considered Sukumar Ray to be a greater genius than the author of *Alice in Wonderland*. Tagore himself was inspired to write some nonsense verse on the model of Sukumar Ray, but he had to admit that writing such stuff was not easy at all. Indeed, he is reported to have observed on one occasion that he could perhaps be everything else, but never a Sukumar Ray. Sukumar Ray also wrote a few prose parodies, the only ones in Bengali, in which he caricatured the prose style of Pramatha Chaudhury most effectively.

Thus in this century, we have seen humour in our literature reach a very high standard as well as grow in profusion. There were many minor contemporaries of Tagore, Dwijendralal, Rajsekhar and Sukumar Ray who, although fine humourists, have been overshadowed by these stalwarts. Among them, Jatindra Kumar Sen and Banbehari Mukherjee, both writers of comic verses, deserve special mention.

Of our contemporaries, outstanding contributions to

humorous literature have been made by Sri Parimal Goswami, the late Sajani Kanta Das, Professor Pramathanath Bisi, Sri Annadasankar Ray, Sri Premendra Mitra, Syed Mujtaba Ali, Srimati Lila Majumdar and many others. But the outstanding humourist of our generation is probably Sivaram Chakrabarty whose ideas are as humorous as his style.

Humour in Bengali literature has now reached a stage of great variety and high standard, and we hardly find a writer today who fails to display some measure of a sense of humour in his writings. Considering the traditions of wit, satire and humour created by great humourists from Iswar Gupta to Rajsekhar and Sukumar Ray, it would be surprising if it were otherwise. A foreigner who becomes newly acquainted with our literature would be surprised to see how the Bengalis can laugh at almost anything, not excluding their own weaknesses. He would perhaps be inevitably reminded of Iswar Gupta's old comment on Bengal: "So torn by conflicts and yet so full of fun".

# HUMOUR

## HINDI

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Dr. DHARAMVIR BHARATI

(Translated by Dr. P. Machwe)

**T**HOUGH the tradition of Hindi literature is of about one thousand years, yet the independent development of humour in its literature is only a modern phenomenon. Not that medieval Hindi literature was completely devoid of humour. The *Ramcharit manas* of Tulsidas and the *Leela-padas* of Surdas, certain sections on rejtation in saint-poets and some *Kavita and Savaiyas* of the *Reeti*-poets do contain a sprinkling of humour. But in such works instead of pure humour, there is more of satire for counter-argument, light wit or occasionally mere exaggeration and surprise-effects. Yet there is one work called *Ardha Katha* by Banarsidas Jain in which there is an interesting description of a Jain merchant. Many of its portions are good examples of humour.

There are many reasons for this lack of humour in Hindi. Firstly, humour is an element which is best manifested in private conversation. Prose is the natural medium of such conversation, and not poetry. In medieval Hindi literature, prose had never achieved any mentionable position. And wherever humour was rendered in verse it always took the shape of critical satire or exaggerated witticism. There is another reason: conversations generating good humour are best conducted in friendly circles or clubs. But courts and theological discussion-groups have a formal atmosphere. Where there is an extraordinary religious preacher and the rest are ordinary listeners or where there is an uncommon King and the rest are common courtiers or bards, real untainted humour which is seen in groups of friends of the same social strata, cannot prosper. It is inevitable that courtly humour is slightly stilted in the element of surprise in wit and in satire. Perhaps successful humour is seen only in portions of *Ardha Katha*, for this common biography of a commoner is written neither for a courtly environment nor for a religious gathering.

In modern times all those circumstances are present which are conducive to the development of humour in literature. Prose



was developed and *Khariboli* was adopted in place of *Brajhasha*, full of delicate sentiments or *Avadhi*, overloaded with religion. *Khariboli* was straight and powerful. On the other hand new democratic ideas created an atmosphere of equality and of all belonging to one level. In it on the one hand the ordinary experiences of an ordinary man and on the other his mundane problems—social, domestic and national—began to be more important than praying to the King or to the gods. So in the first efflorescence of modern Hindi literature one finds such humour for which the base was the domestic, social and political circle of those times. In those humorous writings there is some immaturity, as is natural in the beginning. There is lack of polish and the medieval tendency to play upon words is also seen. But in its total effect, there is some freshness which was possible only in the modern age. In Bharatendu's plays or in Pratapnarain Mishra's essays, in the farces of Badrinath Bhatt or in the epistolary writings of Balmukund Gupta, we see the powerful personality of the modern Hindi writer emerging. He is fearless, he kicks away the medieval feudal inhibitions and mental reservations. He expresses self-confidence and courage. It may be the British rulers of those days or the subscribers of those little reviews they edited, he meets them and all the social reformers and leaders of those days on an equal footing and writes them open letters on the same level. In those writings he sometimes uses delightful leg-pulling.

On the whole, the Hindi humour writer treats society as a friend would treat a friend in a *tete-a-tete*. On the literary level, these writers had their salons where anecdote and laughter, fun-making and fooling went on among themselves. In that atmosphere their speech and style assumed sharpness. It was a friendly battle against each other's wits. On the mental level, the whole nation was a friend's circle. Even if Lord Curzon was Viceroy, Babu Balmukund Gupta addressed him as if he was a new, snobbish but naive member in his private gathering. He was treated with the same reformatory zeal. The special point in that satirical literature was that it was crisp but not bitter. Conscious of the misfortunes of the nation and of social inequalities, there was always a note of optimism and a care-free abandon in it.

The age after that cannot be described as very rich in humour. This was for many reasons: that friendliness and abandon suddenly came to a low ebb because of the disillusionment that

followed the recognition that our rulers and masters were not our friends at that level. Day by day it became clearer that in spite of all their claims of friendship, their proclamations of reform and equality, the British rulers were worse, in fact more dangerous and harmful than our native princes. Our national struggle was carried out at a high tempo. The leadership of this struggle slipped from the hands of the liberals into the hands of the extremists who were all for complete independence. On the one hand the whole country was experiencing a strange psychological tension due to political pressures, on the other hand the cultural renaissance was in its prime in which specific reformist, spiritual and cultural institutions were forcing the entire nation to introspection and self-criticism. This was the age in which Premchand was writing fiction with a reformer's zeal, and every weak person ended in some kind of Ashram or other as a reformatory; on the other hand the *Chhayavadi* poetry was being written in which the soul in bonds was intent on meeting and getting lost in something Boundless. There is no doubt that this is the age of the many great achievements of modern Hindi literature. But it is also clearly seen that the writer has worn a toga or has wrapped himself in the mantle of a reformer and a mystic-seer, that it was extremely inconvenient for him to come down to the level of natural conversation, full of laughter and entertainment. After all, one whose soul is craving every moment to mingle with the boundless Brahma, may take the liberty of talking and laughing inside his private room. But in literature, how could he descend to that level publicly? Yet it is rumoured that while Premchand's giggling with hearty laughter was very memorable; on the other hand Mahadevi's hearty laughter permeated her whole being. Premchand's short stories and some portions of his novels are excellent examples of humour. And Mahadevi has later given very good specimens of her homely, kind, and spontaneous sweet humour in *Atit ke Chalchitra* and *Smriti ki Rekhaben*. But excepting these two names, there is nothing more. Prasad in his *Ek Ghunt* tried to introduce humour into the play. But it is surprising that the open, uninhibited humour of Banaras's friendly private meets is conspicuously absent in the play. Nirala's prose writing has satire which is bitter and concealed.

At that time a new class of writers was writing relatively on a more worldly plane and it had a special type of colourfulness. Two names prominently come to mind: Amritlal Nagar and Bhagawati Charan Verma. Amritlal Nagar has the same

atmosphere of abandon as in salons and friendly gatherings. He knows the broken structure of the feudal social order and he has a remarkable knowledge of the reactions and types born in ordinary people in this historical period. But the biggest thing is that even for every character of which he makes fun, he has sympathy and affection. In fact the high level and special sensitivity which Hindi humour reached at the hands of Amritlal Nagar is unique in its own way; it is matchless.

Bhagwatchesharan Verma's literary personality is relatively more complex. Sometimes he has only abandon and in that mental mood he has given some very successful humorous works in prose as well as in poetry. Sometimes while ridiculing everything his attention is occupied by those personalities who are hollow men and puffed up with false self-complacency. Bhagwati Babu can't resist the temptation of pricking the pretensions of these balloon-like persons. From the *Biggest man in the World* to parts of *Terhe Merhe Raste* (zigzag ways), this tendency has grown up. The false mantle worn in the *chhayavadi* age which is mentioned before, has been forcibly removed or courageously torn by Bhagwati Babu. And so his humour turned sour and bitter. There came a turning wherein he is defeated by his own enemy. He starts wearing that mantle and sometimes in victorious mirth goes about showing off the same mantle just to tease others, and in such moods his humour misses the mark, loses its purity, while Nagar does not do so.

While exposing the hollowness of VIP's, the humour writer set out in another interesting direction. Just after the *Chhayavadi* poetry a very over-sentimental, lachrymose, song-making became popular. From Sharatchandra's *Devdas* to Bachchan's *Nisha Nimantran*, that generation assumed the role of an emotionally charged pessimistic lover. In such hard times, Benarasi salons were heard roaring with laughter. Bedhab Benarasi presented parodies of these over-sentimental songs and they became very popular. In the same poetic gathering the audience on the one hand immersed in the tragic mood after listening to an original songster, indulged in peals of laughter after listening to the parodies of the same songs. From Bedharak and Gopalprasad Vyas to Kaka Hathrasi this tradition is still continuing.

In this connection, another trend is worth mentioning. Before the western culture and modern way of life, the old habits and behaviour-patterns of the Indians became a problem. Old patterns of living and believing had to compromise willingly or



unwillingly with the new ways of life. This contradiction became the subject for many humour writers, who were very popular in their own age. J.P. Shrivastava and Annapurnananda are famous among such writers. But as conditions changed and a synthesis and balance evolved between the old and new, that humour became outdated and now it does not hold the same attraction as it used to.

But with the contradiction in values and ideological conflicts a new class of writers has come forward which has a sharp eye, a sure style and a very sophisticated expression. Among such writers, Harishankar Parsai and Shrilal Shukla are very active and successful. Many other writers contributed to humour, who were basically more attracted to other modes of expression. Humour writing was their secondary occupation, yet it resulted in a good thing. If instead of enumerating the writers we enumerate the humorous stories, caricatures, limericks, *Kinchit Kavitas* (pseudo-poems), farces and witty essays, we shall see these in large quantities. Probably one of the reasons is that the intellectual advance of the new generation was very rapid. In smaller towns and cities, lots of literary *Gosthies* and meetings became active. There were ideological tug-of-wars, and sharp battles of tongues. In such clubs and societies satire always was foremost, as it found the conditions favourable to it. But here we come to a very slippery and dangerous spot. If the experiences in such clubs are not properly universalized, the satire tends to deteriorate into a private joke. A very tragic casualty of such defeated purposes is Keshavchandra Verma. This remarkably talented humour writer had excellent power in his early writings, but slowly it became the private property of a small coterie. Now it is not so generally successful, as the ordinary reader has no interest in the inner mover of pawns on a private chequer-board. Harishanker Parsai and Shrilal Shukla are more successful because they enriched their broader comic sensibility by the experiences of such coteries, and the coteries did not strangle or cripple their humour.

Generally claims are heard that the humour in the Urdu style of Hindi is matchless and unique. In comparison, humour in Hindi is very poor. In my opinion, this claim is one-sided. Much of humour in Urdu is such as will create disgust in us. What will be the result of that type of humour in the mind of Hindi readers? But there is no doubt that in the humour of our Urdu style there is a peculiar charm of its own, which when mingled with the rest of cultured humour Hindi will fill the

big gap between the two. There are also some cross-currents from *Awadhi* and *Braj* folk tradition which add to Hindi humour. But they could not develop fully for want of a proper atmosphere. But whatever is written in those dialects is very naturally devoid of artificiality.

Nowadays, modern trends change so rapidly that one cannot predict anything about them. Yet it is certain that real humour will develop in proportion to a way of thinking which will be natural and which will avoid narrow literary coteries and artificial intellectual masks. In the new Hindi humour writing there is a sense of direction, and it raises high hopes and confidence about its future.

# HUMOUR

## INDO-ANGLIAN LITERATURE

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By H. H. ANNIAH GOWDA

**P**ERHAPS because of one or two exceptions it is apt to be assumed that humour is found in abundance in Indo-Anglian writing. How far this is justified only a humorist can tell, and he must be careful to give a correct view. The Indian nation is known as a serious nation. We have not produced an Aristophanes and we have not an Edward Lear who enjoyed inventing words and writing Nonsense Rhymes. But in ancient times we had our *Panchatantra* and *Hitopadesha* which are full of shrewd humour, and later the picaresque stories about Vikramaditya, which are certainly not very serious, and in places are downright funny. And in the Indo-Anglian period we have S.V.V., the author of *Soap Bubbles* and *More Soap Bubbles* and G. V. Desani of *All About Mr. Haterr* whose readers are wiser and happier for reading them.

The term humour in Indian writing in English perhaps acquires a connotation different from that of the West, where incongruity is the main springboard for it. The B.B.C. third programme refused to participate in the Tagore Centenary because the English audience found Tagore heavy. The different attitudes to humour can be attributed, perhaps, to the philosophical background and introspective nature of Indians, who believe in self-control, which puts a restraint on the activities of human beings and consequently on witty writing. If Chesterton's Bishop had slipped on a banana-skin in an Indian street, people might attribute it to demoniac possession, but they *would* laugh, before rushing to help him up.

Humour has been defined as thinking in fun while feeling in earnest. The Sanskrit writers compare mirth to a flash of lightning that breaks through a cloud and glitters for a moment; while cheerfulness keeps the mind delighted and fills it with steady serenity. Humour in Indian literature can be described as cheerful mirth of the light-hearted type. Incisive satire, bitter cutting, satirical humour, very common in English literature, are foreign to the Indian genius. In some of our Sanskrit



writers it is pitched in a high serious tone, as for example in the famous *Yaksha Prashna* of the Vana Parva, where Yudhistira replies to Yama's question relating to the most wonderful thing in the world, namely the desire of man to cling to the world in spite of the knowledge of mortality. The heaviness of the humour is seen in comparing the earth to a vessel, the sky to its lid, placing it on a fire burning day in and out; the day and night are its fuel, the months and the seasons form the ladles for stirring the fire, Time is the mighty cook burning the creatures round him. I am not suggesting that gentle satire is completely absent from Sanskrit literature. One of the Kashmir poets of the tenth century refers to his own poverty and contrasts it with the high positions enjoyed by the illiterate kinsmen of important people. He speaks of Kha-dyota or sky illumination which cannot brighten even a millimeter of the space near itself, while the sun and the moon have to deny themselves the title. Such similes come closer to the conception of humour of English writers.

Shudraka's character, the "Shakara", who delights in mispronouncing sibilants, is a masterful creation. Sometimes he indulges in anachronisms of false puranic allusions like "You are in my clutches, exactly as Ravana captured Kunti". The Shakara can be compared favourably with the Fool or Touchstone in Shakespeare, who hops like a humming bird among the flowers of stodgy interpretation.

The Indo-Anglians with this literary tradition behind them were exposed to the breeze from the West where humour based on incongruity was in abundance. In the midst of the *Indo-Anglians* was found the humorous writing of some of the "*Anglo-Indians*" such as Thackeray, Forster, Kipling, John Masters and G. O. Trevelyan. But we and our writers are used to reading scholarly, heavy, dull stuff. I am reminded of the "heavy doctors of divinity" of the eighteenth century; we all know that the poet Jeremy Thomson described them as doctors of tremendous paunch, awful and deep, a black abyss of drink.

The contemplation of the incongruities of life which forms the basis of humour is seen in K. S. Venkataramani, who hails from Madras. His short story, "A Curtain Lecture", deals with the difference between the rich and the poor. Ramu, a B.A., a clerk in a revenue office, tells his wife of his sad fate in being the victim of the collector's anger and his wife's helplessness: Meenakshi, his mother-in-law, admonishes him:

"Look at your neighbour. He is not even a matriculate.

With ten years of service, he is a Sub-Magistrate with pomp and power. . . . Look at Kamalamma, your neighbour's wife—the daughter of a poor priest—look at her now, her clothes and jewels and her peacock gait. . . .”

Look here, upon this picture and on that.

These words create manliness in Ramu, who no longer wants to live like a “tadpole in stagnant water”. Venkataramani is a serious writer whose domain is mostly Mylapore, and all his characters have the touch of familiarity. The Comic Muse breathes gently when Kesari, the disappointed advocate, after a long struggle meets a rich client in Periaswamy Iyer:

“Kesari began to survey the client with the potential and eager looks of a young bird of prey, timidly circling in air on its first flight for food. But Periaswamy Iyer was no easy quarry for a vultureling”.

Such kindly portraits dominate the pages of *Murugan the Tiller*.

Aristotle said that what is laughable is merely a subdivision of what is ugly, involving some defect that is not connected with pain or injury. This remark from the *Poetics* can be applied to S.V.V.'s *Soap Bubbles* and *More Soap Bubbles*.

S.V.V. blows his bubbles in a sportive mood. The kindly Humour-Muse sports freely in “An Elephant's Creed in Court”, where the dispute is between the *Vadagalay* and the *Tengalay* caste-marks; a husband's and wife's disagreement on the purchase of a sari; keeping an expensive brother-in-law at college; and the author's advice not to meddle with morning coffee or the Munsif's aversion to beards; the vanity of those who travel by train and the job of the wife who educates her husband about raw vegetables. He says, “Science and my wife were both inexorable and believed that a man can see visions in raw potatoes even more glorious than Shakespeare did when he wrote the best poetry in the world”. The purpose of the humorist is to prick the bubble of one's vanity and to make one flit about with him in sunny, vivid vivacity. Many jokes and funny stories of S.V.V. turn on people being mistaken for someone or something else. One of the best of such stories ever told is of the great comedian Coquelin. The story is how a melancholy looking man, consulting a doctor, was told that what he needed was not medicine but cheering up. “Go and see Coquelin this evening and have a good laugh”. The man shook his head, “I am Coquelin”, he said. This story might almost have been told of Vighneswara, who in real life is a deadly serious defender

of the ancient values but chooses to propagate them with a brilliant but slightly savage humour.

Desani's *All About Mr. Haterr* is a classic of humour. Every page amuses us. Desani's strength in generating laughter lies in his use of words. I ask you to listen to the explosive staccato voice of the man Roarer in the chapter called... *Salute The "Kismet"*.

"O wife! Pre-destined, willing or unwilling, yet so destined, O thou as fish unto waters! Sharer of joy and sorrow! Honey-comb! And my mother, whose lustre is reflected unto me! Brother Pundit, folk! Bless my revered mother, bless this honourable earth, bless the lofty sky, the sun, the moon and the stars of our milk-washed Motherland, who jointly wrought and bought into being the casket of dust whom you now behold speaking in this august assembly!"

Shanker Ram is another story writer whose characters are the "children of the Kaveri": he tells about them with a keen eye, penetrating and humorous. He is endowed with a gift for sympathy and sensibility. One can look for such simple portraits in some of the short stories of Khuswant Singh.

Mulk Raj Anand is a writer with a serious purpose. Perhaps it may be said that he has a thesis. But in one of his novels *The Big Heart* there is a feeling of disproportion: the conflict between the old group emotions and the new group ferment under the impact of money values and industrialisation, resulting in a new unity, a new harmony. Incongruity is seen in the novelist's planting of the giant Anantha among the *Thalthiars*, the coppersmiths, who are beaten to the ground because of the introduction of the machine. This powerful giant, a defender of the machine, is destroyed; but with his death his ideas are realised. There is a disproportion between the emotions and their cause, which could be the basis of a humorous situation. Anand has a carefully considered philosophical attitude. His characters are torn loose from the old community moorings and painfully and patiently fight their way to a new world. His purpose as a writer is best explained in his own words about Tagore:

"Our destiny is bound up with the people as of children to their parents, for we have to inherit the memories of their suffering and we have to expiate it in our art."

R. K. Narayan is cast in a different mould. His genius for comedy has been steady. His light has never burnt dim. He looks at things from a detached pedestal. He started as a short story



writer holding not a large mirror but a pocket-mirror to human society, and portraying some significant episodes in the life around him in that imaginary land Malgudi. The Astrologer with his forehead resplendent with sacred ash and vermilion, opening his bag punctually at mid-day, prophesying the future of many people but not knowing his own; Iswaran's indifference to examination results and his note to his father telling him that by the time the father sees that letter he will be at the bottom of the Sarayu river; and the behaviour of Sastri's boss in *All Avoidable Talk* show that Narayan started by concentrating on some trait of human character with the kindly eye of the artist. This gift for creating characters, like fiery-eyed Vedanayakam failing to impose discipline on a turbulent class, is part of the humour in *Swamy and Friends*. Soon the grape juice ferments into wine in his *Bachelor of Arts*, where the hero Chandran, disappointed in love, becomes a bogus Sadhu, determined never to marry. But this does not stop him dropping everything and rushing to the bedside of his second beloved when he hears that she has a slight cold. Narayan's facile pen makes this incongruity the basis of a good story. He looks at family life calmly in *The Dark Room*, with a critical eye at sophisticated society in *Mr. Sampath*, and with a serious eye at his own society in *The English Teacher*. As the story-writer blooms into a maturer, profounder novelist, Narayan's writing becomes more detached, but never loses the ironical touch. Narayan's domain is small: Malgudi and its characters are of the workaday world. The Comic Muse breathes through the familiar surroundings—the cobblestones of Market Road, the sands on the Sarayu bank, the banyan tree outside the Central Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank under which Margayya grew to be a legend, Kabir Street and the Lawley Extension. The hero of *The Financial Expert* like all Narayan's heroes has no heroics about him—and through him Narayan's sensibility operates. Margayya, a shrewd mortgagee, inspired by a desire to become wealthy, becomes the owner of a manuscript, *Bed Wife* or *The Science of Marital Happiness*, and becomes rich. In telling this unbelievable story, Narayan gives a picture of a madman:

"He wore an ochre robe and had grown a beard. From two tall incense holders smoke was curling. The man had about him a heap of post-cards, a pen and a writing pad. He was writing furiously. . . . He had an attendant fanning him, although there was an electric fan above. There were

two soft cushions along the wall. The man took no notice of the arrival of the visitors. The Inspector whispered to Margayya: 'Take your seat there'. . . . The attendant bent over and whispered into the ear of the big man. He put away the pen, leaned back and looked at the Inspector. The Inspector salaamed. The other's face relaxed a little, and a smile hovered about it; but the next moment it became rigid again and he said: 'Who is that mortal next to you who does not seem to recognise us? Is it likely that we are invisible to his eyes?' 'Yes, that's so,' said the Inspector. 'That is the correct explanation.' 'Oh, it never occurred to me. I can make myself seen. We often forget that we divine creatures are transparent, and that we cannot be seen.' 'But it is easily remedied, if your holiness makes up your mind.' The other shook his head in approval, then waved his arm, looked at Margayya, and asked: 'Do you see me?' The Inspector muttered: 'Salute him.' 'Yes,' replied Margayya with a reverential *Salaam*. 'Now, what is your business, mortal?' "

Besides the creation of characters Narayan has many other ways of making us laugh. One of these is the contrast between two kinds of life, the humdrum and the sophisticated, as in the case of the central character in *The Guide*.

If detachment is at the root of all genuine humour, *My Dateless Diary* abounds in many passages of kindly, gentle irony.

Narayan passes the responsibility of carrying something to a son-in-law in a foreign country to his friend travelling by ship. Immediately at the mention of his friend's name the Father-in-law grows lyrical and finds several approaches to him:

"Oh, I know that family so well. His brother was my class-mate. His aunt was—was good to us when we were in Kolar, his cousin has married my nephew".

When the friend agreed to carry a little packet, the father-in-law choked the passage of his house with a wooden chest, the sort of thing that thirteen pirates sat on, a burlap containing possibly brinjals and cucumbers, and three more nondescript bundles. The gentleman was asked to reduce the bulk of his gift to his son-in-law by seventy percent or so, or he threatened to leave it behind. The father-in-law started off on how his cousin was married to his nephew, how devoted he was to his cricket-loving brother, how he had watched his Oxford career.

For the happiest effects of humorous creation there is needed not only character but that elusive element, atmosphere. The characters in the novel or story must be surrounded by a

peculiar medium, what we loosely call 'make believe'. They must be seen through air coloured to a slight bluishness as from the rising sun against a hill. Perhaps I may say that a writer of novels of humour should wear coloured glasses. In Nityanandan's *The Long Long Days*, an air of make-believe surrounds his characters—the speech-loving Subramanyam, the grass-munching, brinjal-loving, diet-monger, Krishnan, the Baptism of the Babes, the Fresh Graduates' day, the fancy dress competition and the production of a play with its thumping climax. He makes use of the proclivities of the undergraduates to "create a broad swathe of fun through the literary field".

Occasional characters planted in Rajan's *Too Long In the West* add to the joyous atmosphere. I let the novelist speak:

"Everywhere friezes of figures were capering through the mists towards the sagging *pandal* and the circular awning where Kubera stood at the centre of expectation, participating in his embroidered dhoti, his skin fat with rare oils, smeared with saffron and sandalwood paste and barricaded by marks of religion and dignity. The air was heavy with incense, the ground dewy with *attar* and with the petals of fresh flowers, wilting from their vividness".

Perhaps it is too early to look for long passages of humour in Balachandra Rajan.

Raja Rao and Kamala Markandaya endeavour to create little humorous situations which break the monotony of long narrative stories. One of the distinctive features of Indian novelists is that they confine their scenes to a small place—Malgudi, Mylapore or Mysore. They are like Jane Austen. Their characters move in a limited world, they describe a narrow section of Indian life. They tell us fairy tales and make us forget the realities of the world. The Comic Muse has a limited field and they show the close alliance of comicality and sadness.

But on the whole this commodity looks foreign to us. We as a nation are admittedly deficient in humour. Our novelists and short-story writers have a long way to go. Our way of looking at things is different from that of the West. The humour of situation, as of character, varies from age to age, from writer to writer, and from culture to culture. In the days of Scott and Dickens, we see contrast, the funny and the serious, the crying and the laughing; they come off and on in regular alternation like Box and Cox or the two cuckoos of a Swiss clock. This



rapid alternation of joy and sorrow infuriated the French writer Jules Janin and made him denounce it in Dickens:

"It is the most sickening mixture you can imagine, of hot milk and sour beer, of fresh eggs and salt beef, rags and embroidered coats, gold sovereigns and penny pieces, roses and dandelions. They fight, they kiss and make it up, they swear at one another, they get drunk, they die of starvation. Do you like stale tobacco, garlic, the taste of fresh pork and the noise of a tin pan beaten against the cracked copper saucepan? Then try to read this last book of Dickens."

If a French writer can be so blind to the humour of Dickens, it should not surprise us if humour written by an Indian writer in English sometimes fails to appeal, if our little Huckleberry Finns and Sam Wellers are still asleep on Chamundi Hill waiting for the sun to warm them. But G. V. Desani is an exception.

The humour-material in the Indo-Anglians does not, after all, occupy much space in the realm of modern letters. But they are racy of India; in them the Indian setting is real enough for us to reach out and touch; their humour is about *our* people living in *our* surroundings and influenced by our customs and faiths.

We need not ask a serious question: whether the humour in our writers makes sense, what vision of the world it conveys. The humour of our writers consists chiefly in seeing things in a different light. They try to make our little life, incongruous as it is, rounded with a laugh.

# HUMOUR

## MODERN KANNADA

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By M. S. SUNKAPUR

**I**T is sometimes said that humour is neither recognised as a way of life, nor admitted as a form of expression in Indian Literature. Like most generalisations, this remark is only partially true. Such an observation is also made with equal vehemence about Kannada literature. Probably as applied to ancient Kannada literature the remark may be regarded as true. But still we cannot forget that among the *Rasas* declared by our ancient Aestheticians and literary theorists as the basis and substance of all literary activity, humour is one of the basic emotions, its source being an awareness of the strange, the grotesque, and things out of the common, a sense of incongruity, and absurdity of action, dress or speech. This proves how the *Rasa* of Humour, or *Hasya Rasa* had been recognised as an important element in creative art, and that it had been given a place in the scheme of things.

However, in practice, certain other conventions intereverted to modify the theory. Consequently, like a few other *rasas*, *Hasya Rasa* or Humour, was not regarded as fit for independent treatment, or as full matter for a work of art, and so was made part of another, namely *Sringara*. Hence the scope of Humour in old Kannada Literature was limited. Humour could never be the Hero, he could only come in as a *Vidusaka*. Yet, limited as the range was, poets in old Kannada Literature have not failed to achieve a noticeable excellence in the treatment of humour.

It may be true, generally speaking, that the solemn, religious background of life and thought of ancient India tended to limit the free play of humour both in life and in literature. Thus the spirit of Humour in the life and literature of Kannada can be said to have been kept prisoner to the conventional, serious way of looking at life, and expressing experience in literature. One of the major benefits that contact in modern times with foreign literatures, chiefly English, has brought to Kannada life and art, is the liberation of this sense of humour.

Under the impact of these foreign literary practices and critical thought, new forms of literary expression like the lyric, the one-act play, the novel, the short story, the essay, etc. have entered Kannada literature. Most of the older forms like the epic have been found to be outdated and are dropped. Prose has slowly come into its own, and has become the chief mode of literary creation and has branched out in many directions. An intense outburst of lyric emotion has occurred during these years. Ancient *kavya* was busy with the world outside, and spoke of battles, heroes and kings. The lyric way of feeling life has come up in literature, with its rich discovery of the hidden world of the poet's heart.

The new forms that were brought in, corresponded to the emergence of new ways of feeling life, new ways of thinking in art, new modes of expression, new styles in communication, a repatterning of imagery, illustration, etc. Thus the revolution that occurred in Kannada literature is two-fold. It is a revolution in technique and form: it is also a psychological revolution, a change in the mode of experience.

The modern Kannada lyric is the creation of B.M. Shri Srinivasa, D. V. G. Panje Mangesh Rao, Kandengodlu Shankar Bhat, Shant Kavi and a number of others. It attained a special beauty and dignity in the hands of Kuvempu, and Ambikatanaya Datta. A host of others have helped the growth of this poetry, some following the path of these pioneers and great masters, and a new generation breaking fresh ground. Early lyric poetry is highly romantic, musical, and visionary. Yet some of it has its light moods, and an unmistakable touch of humour.

In the younger generation, humour is more dominant. It appears like the very substance of its experience, and some young writers have humour in style and technique, they have even experimented with "humorous poetry" like the limerick, parody and the mock-heroic. Light verse is still in its experimental stage. It is full of promise and it seems to agree well with the young Kannada mind.

Humour shines out much more prominently in modern Kannada prose than in poetry. Prose tends to varied forms of expression, like the novel, the one-act play, the short story, pen portraits, essays of various types, etc. There is a greater scope for humour in all these than in poetry.

The novel is a portrait of life and depicts the interaction of



man and his environment. Hence, to the novelist, humorous or laughable situations are available in plenty, and he has scope in his writings for the play of humour. The earliest Kannada novels were mostly translations from Bengali and Marathi. The first original Kannada novel *Madiddunno Maharaya* of Putanna is outstanding for its humour, though it cannot claim greatness from the point of view of plot and characterisation. Unusual situations and surprises constitute a rich source of material for humour, and the novel has them in plenty. The element of mild satire on society runs through the strange situations depicted in the novel. A. N. Krishna Rao is among the foremost of the Kannada novelists who initiated the social novel and helped it to grow in variety and profusion. Kuvempu and Karant occupy the same position as Krishna Rao. *Kanur Heggaditi* of Kuvempu has situations of deep humour, but the merit of introducing rich, ripe humour which is not only pleasant but provocative, falls to Shri Shiva Rama Karant. He can laugh with not a trace of anger or illwill. He is indeed one of the most outstanding humorous writers of today. Satire on society is woven into genial humour in his novels. There are some books containing humour like *Devadutaru* and *Gnana*. Innumerable are novels in modern Kannada but not all of them have caught and conveyed the note of humour, though quite a few have the right spirit. The leading novelists are Shri Ranga, Goorur, Beechi, Na. Kasturi. Individual and social satire has developed and is still developing among Kannada writers; but satire in the political and religious fields has yet to develop.

Drama is a field wherein humour can have a great scope—Kailasam and Shriranga wrote comedies and are predominantly social satirists. But their approach to social ills is different. Kailasam is roused to laughter by the social evils, though he is alive to the sense of injustice, pain, and sorrow behind them, but the same social evils provoke Shriranga to anger and retaliation though he also sees what is laughable there. Thus their satires have different tones.

Of the other dramatists who wrote one-act plays, Karant is important. His dramas like *Grabha Gudi* and *Narad Garva Bhanga* are not only parodies but impressive satires also. D. R. Bendre, Parvatavani, Ank, Beechi, are dramatists in whose writings run a deep current of humour. There are, besides, other forms of stage presentation where humour is allowed free play. The object of humour in all these is reform of the abuses and defects in Society.

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Shrinivasa may rightly be called the father of the short story in Kannada. Technique, characterisation, presentation, style, in all these he is outstanding among short story writers. There is no aspect of life which he has not touched; he sees the laughable part of a situation and portrays it to create a fine humour. Humour has been deftly woven into his stories. Shri Gopal Krishna Rao and Ananda carried on the tradition of Shrinivasa. In the stories of Ananda, humour stands out only here and there. But in Gopal Krishna Rao it springs out prominently and refreshingly in the midst of the play of destiny on human life. True presentation of the laughable aspects of life can be seen in the stories of Karant also. Of the short story writers who use humour and caricature as the chief medium for their stories, Gorur is the outstanding. Like Goldsmith he is endowed with a genial humour. His pictures of rural life and his characters remain distinctly in our memory because his portrayal is infused with a ripe humour. But of late the short story writing which began about four decades ago and achieved so much so quickly seems to be waning. This is not a pleasing prospect.

Another form of literary creation which has taken its origin mainly from Western literature is the Essay. This again appears in numerous forms like the contemplative essay, the humorous essay, the pen-portrait, etc. Sometimes a thought which springs up unexpectedly leads the writer to further thoughts and ideas, and this takes the form of the light essay, though it is reflective. The essential element of this kind of essay is parody or caricature through the medium of fun and humour. In this kind of writing there is full freedom for the writer, and as a result, humour has plenty of scope for full expression. Writers like A. N. Murti Rao, Gorur, N. Kasturi, Shri Ranga have written in this form of literature and have shown the way for its further development. Parody, irony, burlesque sarcasm, caricature, all these appear in these writings, but the prominent element in them is humour. In some like Shri Ranga and Karant there is behind the humour, the pain and the pathos of human life; there is a sharp and biting pungency behind the humour. These writings have a great social value, for, when they make us laugh, they also make us see life in a true perspective and make us think from this point of view. These writers are great teachers also. Such writings must grow in plenty in our literature.

Humour has a vital role to play in journalism. Newspapers and journals should enlighten people to the truth about events

and personalities. This enlightenment can come easily when it comes through the medium of humour. *Punch* in England is the outstanding example of this. But humorous papers and journals of that type are sadly wanting in Kannada, though there are some like *Koravanji*, *Naguv Nand*, *Vikatakavi* whose contents are chiefly humorous. Humour has a great part to play in journalism, but in Kannada that realisation has yet to come. Quite a large part of the jealousy and spite of political life might disappear if humour is wisely and descriminatingly employed in newspapers. In the west, humorous portraits and caricatures play a great part in journals. A few lines of a portrait can have as much effect as page after page of humorous writing. Kannada journals must learn that art.



# HUMOUR

## MODERN KASHMIRI

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By J. L. KAUL

AT ABOUT the turn of the last century and far into it, the Kashmiris were, by and large, a sad people. Centuries-old oppression and the visitations of flood, famine and epidemic, and internal factions which had been coming with a periodic regularity, had borne heavily upon them and weighed down their spirits and imagination. Apart from the *raas-leela* lyric, which came to be written later in the century, it is rarely that we find joy or gaiety of spirit, not to speak of humour, in Kashmiri literature. Two things, however, seem to have brought some mirth and cheerfulness into the gloom of the countryside. First, the fairs and festivals associated with the local shrines, *ziarats* or *tiraths* (and they are all over the valley); and, secondly, *Baandajashan*, a sort of open-air village folk-theatre managed by companies of professional players or minstrels. Clever at improvisation, these *Baands* or *Bhagats* invariably introduced the typical character of a Kashmiri peasant, a *groos*, impressed into *begaar* or forced labour, who by his verbal fencing and evasive replies (*daamb*) evoked laughter and who, appreciating the incongruity of his own situation, could laugh with others even at himself. They also enacted, with their wonted good humour and satiric mimicry, comic scenes in which the social and bureaucratic excesses of the time were laughed at.

It was for the first time about the middle of the 19th century that Kashmiri produced a poet, famous as the author of the metrical love romance, *Gulrez*, who had the eye to observe, albeit not with a large-hearted charity, the foibles and the ludicrous incongruities of behaviour of a Kashmiri peasant (*groos*). Maqbool Shah of Kralawoer belonged to the class of *Peers*, the Muslim religious guides; and he found it hard to conceal his spite or withhold his sarcasm, which mar the humour of his *greesmaama*. He does, however, attempt blending his satirical attitude with humour when, for instance, he contrasts the welcome with which the *groos* receives the village official, *Sazowul*, with the apathy which he shows for the *Peer*, whose

visit sends him into hiding in the cattle-shed ("yabar oeesith atsan gaanas andar taam"); or when he describes how ingeniously the *groos* can wheedle money out of you; or, again, when he tells the amusing anecdote ("asun laayakh kuisah akh") about how stingy the *groos* could be. This *masnavi* of Maqbul Shah and his *peernaama* set in vogue the fashion of writing other such comic-satiric *masnavis* and, indeed, provoked a reply from Mirza Meer of Beru village whose *muaqadam naama* is, however, more of an apology in defence of the peasant and, from a literary point of view, a mere invective.

Nothing of importance in this genre is produced till the last decade of the century unless mention is deservedly made, firstly, of the comic element in the Mohini episode of *Radhasvayamvara* by Parmananda (1791-1879) when Sri Krishna, disguised as a bangle-seller, goes to Radha and teasingly talks ill of her fiance, that is, himself; and, secondly, of the comic characterisation of the priest go-between both in his, and later, of Krishna Razdan's *Sivalagan*. It was in the last decade of the century that Sir Aurel Stein and Rev. J. Hinton Knowles collected some folk tales of Kashmir. In Stein's *Hatim's Tales* we have a valuable humorous poem entitled *Yarkand anon zenaan* by Sabir Tilawony. It is an amusing description of how very thoroughly we, in Kashmir, set about preparing for the conquest of Yarkand in Central Asia, impressing into service potters and cobbler-scavengers and, what's more, not only men but also women, with child or in childbed, collecting horses from "fowl" villages ("gury manganoccevikh kwakar gaaman"), equipping them with cruppers on their heads and reins on their tails and with strong grass pack-saddles.

About the last years of the 19th century and in the early years of the present, we find several poets writing humorous poems. Mohi-ud-din, better known as Mahdi Deeka, wrote some humorous quatrains and epigrams wherein the humour lies chiefly in an unexpected juxtaposition of Kashmiri with Persian. His verses are not only indelicate but usually indecent and offend against good taste. Such is also the case with Mulla Habib-Ullah Hakeem, a younger contemporary of his, who wrote several *ghazals* on the model of Mahdi like the one beginning "*khwadaawandi hand-o wrapal haakh raa*". He also wrote a few amusing poems (like *paagal saakinaama* and, better still, *sahlabnaama*, a poem in Kashmiri which describes the comic side of a flood and which, from the literary point of view, is the first attempt at a humorous poem unalloyed by any re-

formist indignation or satire). Nazim of Vepbrot wrote a few fine poems including the humorous parody of a well-known mystical poem of Mahmud Gami; and Munawar Shah of Bandapur wrote a long poem on Gilgit *begaar* (forced labour).

For some time past the socio-economic conditions accentuated by the apathy and inefficiency of the corrupt bureaucracy appeared to have stirred not only the pity and anger but also the humour of the poets. For, the Kashmiri, finding himself powerless to remedy or to mitigate his ills, learnt to laugh at his sorrows, his humour being his only armour against fate. A certain class of talented men, mostly poets, known as *lari thoh*, had begun writing comic-satiric ballads describing the discomfiture of people under the stress of natural calamities. For we can laugh at our discomfiture and also at the funny adjustments necessitated by the new conditions.

In the recent period of our literature which begins from 1925, we find some influence trickling from the Punjab, mainly through the Parsi Theatrical Company and Alfred Theatrical Co., which performed Aga Hashar Kashmiri's Urdu plays. Kashmiri authors began now to translate some of these Urdu and Hindi plays and introduced in them comic scenes after the drama of Aga Hashar. This was successfully done by the late Nand Lal Kaul in several of his translations (like *Satwich Kahanoet*) and by Ghulam Nabi Dilsoz of Noetypoor in his skits. The most notable comic poet of this period, however, is Lakshman Razdan (of Haanad Tsawalgom village) whose poems *daaka wol*, *mirahoeemy saal*, *Weshai khaandar*, *gaadadyagul*, *Totagudarin*, *chaay* and, above all, *Lala Lakhman Shakhare draaw* (in the last of which he recounts John-Gilpin-wise, his own misadventures). Though many of his poems, in varying degrees, raise a snigger or a chuckle rather than a laugh, yet it remains true that his poems are poems of genuine humour. Two *ghazals* of Abdul Ahad Azad, in which the lover pleads his helplessness in the matter of courtship for want of leisure owing to the humdrum preoccupations of his domestic life, are by intent and in execution frankly humorous. And so are also three at least of Mahjoor's *ghazals*, notably the *ghazal* on our newly-won freedom. Freedom is compared variously to a brooding hen hatching eggs of profit and pleasure, a newly-wed bride preoccupied with feasts and festivities and even to an inconvenient concubine who gives birth to an unwanted child and, consequently, to inconvenient problems.

Most of the writers of to-day, that is, after the 1947-48



Pakistan-sponsored raid, seem to be earnest about changing the world; and they take themselves and their dissatisfactions a little too seriously. Few of our present-day writers have the detachment or the maturity of outlook to see that the world will go jogging on its own way notwithstanding our brave challenges and flag-wavings. There are, however, notable exceptions. In Deepak Kaul's story, *Radkhikakuiny broeer*, too much inquisitiveness lands Radhakak's wife into a ludicrous predicament from where she can be extricated only when people are told that it is not she but only a cat. Akhtar Mohi-ud-din's story, "*dand wazun*" blends the serious and the comic in a satisfying success. The first scene of Som Nath Zutshi's play "*modur mas*" introduces two women guests who are heard making subtle, sharp but humorous remarks about their hostess. And, perhaps, the comic muse at its subtlest and best in Kashmiri short story, though it is not unmixed with irony, is to be found in Amin Kamil's "*honi Rahman*" and "*kaukar jang*", particularly in the latter, in which the foibles and eccentricities of character of two women neighbours, Jaana Bits and Shah Maal, are expressed through their respective cocks.

In "*Niza Soeb*" and *Mr Machaama*, made popular as radio features, Pushkar Bhan utilizes both humour and wit in his comic characterisation. Niza Saib is a scion of an aristocratic country-side family which has migrated to the city where the incongruities of adjustment often make him cut a ridiculous figure. Mr. Machaama is a young man in his twenties and belongs to a family which has recently promoted itself from the lower classes to the middle class and which has, therefore, the ambition to see their young hopeful succeed in life. In his efforts to succeed, the young man makes of himself a thoroughly laughable character as, for instance, when he acts in his home as a hero of a film would; or when he tries to be modern and *a la* cinema, makes love to a girl and gets thrashed for his pains; or when he pretends to be a non-Kashmiri and raises a laugh trying to talk other people's tongues. Though sometimes the situations created are burlesque and the fun hilarious, we find here a sustained plot and amusing incongruities of speech and action which provoke spontaneous laughter. Mention may be made also of the reformist poem *Gil draayi astaan* by Imam Din Makhmoor which is written in a humorous vein. The humorous poet of the present day is Ghulam Mohi-ud-din, "*Khazir Maghribi*". He appears, by his very temperament, to be a poet who looks at objects and themes in a humorous way; and so

he writes poems which are humorous not only in their theme and intent but also in style, in which even the metre which he employs is a source of laughter. He presses into service tunes from Punjabi, Pahari (hilly areas) or even from the cinema; and he has given us humorous descriptions of present day stock characters like Boely Beg. Both Pushkar Bhan and Khazir Maghribi verge on the farcical.

Summing up, I should say that while the Kashmiri is justly noted for his retort and repartee, pun and play upon words that come naturally to his tongue, and subtle sarcasm, his forte has been, generally speaking, wit rather than humour.

# HUMOUR

## MODERN MARATHI

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By W. L. KULKARNI

**T**HE latter half of the 19th century was a period of ideological upheaval almost revolutionary in character in the mental life of Maharashtra. It was a period of general awakening after a deep slumber. The impact of western thought was markedly seen in the changed attitude of the intellectuals towards questions relating to religion, social customs, conventions and morals, education and politics. The age-old concept of social justice reflected in every-day behaviour was receiving a very rude shock. An urgent need to revise the relation between the opposite sexes—a relation very unfair to the weaker sex—was suddenly being felt. The status of the woman in society, in the family and in all walks of life was engaging the attention of intellectuals and was becoming a subject of heated debate. In short, western thought had lent a new vision, a new method of approach to all problems; the word—no matter whether it was that of the 'Védās' or of the 'Shrutis' was no longer sacred, no longer law, it was often being challenged now. The intellectuals had found a new weapon: the rationalistic approach, which challenged every established dogma.

Maharshi M. G. Ranade, though a moderate, had paved the way towards this general awakening with his writings and speeches, but Lokahitawadi, Jyotiba Fule, and Agarkar in particular were the real crusaders in this relentless struggle. Because struggle it was. The new outlook was not entirely welcome. It was ridiculed, hated, opposed with extraordinary fervour and conviction from all sides. The forces in the opposition camp, radical in their political and national outlook but conservative in their social viewpoint, were equally strong and vocal; they had the advantage of public support. Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, Tilak and others led this group. The times therefore witnessed a great ideological battle fought on several fronts between these two warring camps.

The first humorous writings came out of this wordy ideological warfare. This war was fought both on the pulpit and in the



columns of the press. We naturally witness a sudden flowering of Marathi journalism in these times, and these journalistic writings of the period abound in satire, sarcasm, irony and invective. All weapons in the armoury of ridicule are very freely and confidently used by the combatants. Vishnushastri is a master of sarcasm and invective. He belongs to the camp of the conservatives, and ridicules the idea of religious and social reform. Agarkar, the champion of the new outlook, is a straight fighter but sometimes gets impatient with the deep-rooted orthodox opinion and then plunges headlong into bitter sarcasm.

The prose of the last three decades of the 19th century thus sparkles with wit, irony, satire and the sardonic. The prose of Lokahitwadi who wrote his *Shatapatrās* between 1848 and 1850 was halting and was not quite sure of itself. But a transformation takes place in the meantime and we find that the prose of Chiplunkar, Agarkar, Tilak and Shivram Mahadeo Paranjpe is firm-footed, confident and has an unbelievable capacity for all turns of expression. Of the many factors that contributed to this sudden coming of age of Marathi prose, this urgent necessity to attack and to counter-attack opinion felt by the thinker-writers of the period is an important factor to be reckoned with. Humorous writing by its very nature is a *Vakrokti* and all these writers necessarily resort to *Vakrokti*. It was this factor in particular that suddenly revealed the immense potentialities of Marathi prose. In the hands of Shivram Pant Paranjpe it almost became an art. His writings in the periodical called *Kal* (The Times), levelled against the British Raj, are full of excellent examples of satire and irony. He was, like Tilak, a conservative so far as social and religious reform were concerned, but a flaming radical in his political outlook, and his superb attempts to ridicule and expose 'the enemy' spring out of this attitude.

But it was the first decade of the 20th century that saw the first humorous essay being written in Marathi. This was in the year 1902 and the essay was written by Shripad Krishna Kolhatkar, aptly regarded as the father of Marathi humorous writing. Kolhatkar had studied the writings of Voltaire, Sterne, Fielding, Smollett, Molière, Pascal, Cervantes, Mark Twain and Jerome K. Jerome but was very much impressed by those of the last two and modelled his first attempts on the style of these two veterans. But he soon discarded the models and developed his own independent pattern of the humorous essay. He believed in social reform and was an ardent follower of the

great social thinker, Agarkar. His humorous essays, which he continued to write for more than twenty years, cover a wide range of subjects. They embrace the worlds of religion, law, social behaviour, literature and several aspects of Maharashtrian social, religious and cultural life.

Kolhatkar was a brilliant satirist, with a rapier-like wit, and his first essays raised quite a hornet's nest. He was bitterly attacked by orthodox opinion but withstood the attack valiantly. He was a creative artist, and his fertile imagination created in his essays a world of characters and incidents that satirised several aspects of Maharashtrian thought and behaviour. He was a master of epigram and the antithetical construction. He did not merely write satire, but his writings abound in examples of pure wit, sarcasm, irony and humour. He showed the way how such writing is done; and we find a host of writers in the coming years following in his footsteps. The chief among them was 'Balakram' i.e. Ram Ganesh Gadkari, who modelled his essays and sketches in *Rikampanachi Kamgiri* on those of Kolhatkar.

Ram Ganesh is primarily a wit and, though he also sometimes aims at satire, his writings entertain much more than they disturb. He, like his guru, was master of epigram, and the epigrammatic and antithetical style of expression current in the Marathi humorous writing of today owes a good deal to his efforts and to those of his guru. The essay and the loose essay-cum-story form of humorous writing developed by Shripad Krishna and Ram Ganesh was to gain immediate currency in the times to come, and we saw its flowering first in the writings of Captain Limaye in the twenties and then in the sparkling essays, sketches and various other writings of the veteran, Shri P. K. Atre, mostly in the thirties. Shri Atre can be said to have perfected the idiom of humorous prose forged by Shripad Krishna and Gadkari.

The place of Professor C. V. Joshi who began to write in the twenties along with Atre but really came into his own in the thirties is unique in the history of modern Marathi humorous writing. Though Professor Joshi followed in the footsteps of the great Shripad Krishna, he developed in the course of his writing a style which can be called entirely his own. If Gadkari is primarily a wit, Professor Joshi is primarily a humorist. He has, like Shripad Krishna and Gadkari, created quite a few comic characters which have become household names in the Marathi reading world, but his primary aim in creating these

characters and their world is not satire but pure humour. His writings glow with that sympathetic touch of understanding which is a characteristic of pure humour. A host of writers tried their hand at this genre in the thirties, but mention can be made here of only a few. Shri Shamrao Oak lent variety and colour to it by inventing within its sphere various forms of humorous and satirical expression. And then in the forties Shri P. L. Deshpande came on the scene.

P. L., as he is commonly known in Maharashtra, has been writing in this genre now for more than fifteen years, and though apparently his attempts are straight in the tradition of Shripad Krishna and Gadkari, he, with his imagination, wit, wonderful capacity for quick turns of expression, wide sympathy, almost an uncanny sense of the ludicrous, and an infinite power of observation, has enriched and enlarged that tradition considerably. No sphere of human activity usually escapes his notice but it must be said that activity in the field of Literature has engaged his attention continuously. This can be said of Atre, Shamrao Oak and a few others also; but P. L. Deshpande's attempts at parody in this sphere are really superb. He has a quick eye that easily detects the sham from the real in the world of everyday literary activity and exposes it mercilessly. His collections abound in examples of this kind of writing. His recent book *Batātyāchi Chawl* is an eloquent satire on the petty world of the chawl-dwellers in a city like Bombay. Shri P. L. Deshpande is essentially a satirist but his satire has sometimes a touch of pathos which uplifts it.

Quite a number of young writers like V. A. Buva, Vasant Sabnis and others are at present trying their hand at the loose essay-cum-story form of humorous writing, and an adventurous editor like Anant Antarkar is trying to run a magazine entirely given to such writing, but among the young humorists of the day the name of Bal Gadgil certainly stands apart. In his recent collection *Lotāngan* he has given us pieces which are excellent examples of very intelligent satire mainly on the literary practices of the day.

I dwelt at length on the progress of Marathi humorous writing practised in the genre of the essay and the loose essay-cum-story form of writing started by Shripad Krishna. But this is not all. Humour has found expression in other forms of Marathi writing as well.

Marathi dramatic writing is very rich in humour. It was in the year 1882 that a musical comedy that is still a hot favourite



of the Marathi theatre-goers came to be written and staged. It is a mythological called *Soubhadra*, beautifully constructed, replete with incidents and characters that lend grace to a pure comedy. Annasaheb Kirloskar, the father of modern Marathi drama, wrote and produced it. A number of farces, mostly crude but some satirical in content, were written during the last three decades of the 19th century and served as curtain-raisers to the plays prior to the advent of the new drama ushered in by Shri Annasaheb Kirloskar: Side by side with this was the *Tamasha*, the powerful folk-theatre of Maharashtra with its wonderful technique of make-believe, entertaining large rural audiences of the male sex, with its erotic song, dance, ready wit and biting satire. The *Tamasha* has not lost its spontaneous appeal to the Marathi rural mind and is still a hot favourite of rural Maharashtra in spite of the ordeal of pre-censorship through which it has to pass now. The farces referred to above, though modelled on the western pattern, had many features common with the *Tamasha*. They were crude, had a touch of vulgarity, but were bristling with native wit and sarcasm. But in the eighteen eighties Annasaheb Kirloskar changed the course of Marathi drama.

Govind Ballal Deval who followed the great Annasaheb Kirloskar had a real sense of the dramatic and he gave the Marathi theatre *Sanshaya Kallol*, a delightful comedy of error that has not lost its original glow even once during the last fifty years. *Sanshaya Kallol* is a comedy purely Marathi by nature with a slight touch of the farcical, that was luckily born out of an attempt at adaptation of an almost unknown English play into Marathi. Deval's innate sense of the comic transformed the original insignificant play into a comedy rich in comic characters, situations and dialogue. Shripad Krishna to whom reference has already been made, also wrote plays. He was not a successful playwright, but he introduced an element of humour mainly based on wit and epigram into his plays which, because of its verbal brilliance, attracted a good many playwrights including Ram Ganesh Gadkari.

Kolhatkar, whose genius really suited the writing of comic plays, all the time tried his hand at writing melodramatic romances with a social purpose and was therefore unsuccessful at playwriting. But his two attempts at writing satirical comedies, namely, *Sahachārini* and *Parivartan* are worthy of note and remind us of the strength that he revealed in his humorous essays, collected in *Sudāmyāché Pohé*.

Gadkari, whose genius too was eminently suited for the comic play, also tried to write serio-comic melodramas and, though he was to some extent successful on the stage, we could not get a pure comedy or a satirical play from his pen, except the unfinished *Vedyāchā Bajar*. But Gadkari's plays abound in comic characters and situations which are loved by the Marathi theatre. A master of epigram, he had a wonderful sense of the ludicrous, and these comic scenes from his plays are often independently produced and do entertain Marathi audiences to this day.

The twenties and the thirties saw the rise of a comic artist named Madhavrao Joshi whose plays, *Municipality*, *Varhādachā Pātil* and a host of others had an element of the indigenous *Tamasha*, mixed with biting satire. His plays which had evolved a technique of their own were a great success on the stage, as they were more uninhibited and unsophisticated. Some of Mama Varerkar's dramatic attempts do remind us of the drawing-room comedy of manners, but he cannot be classed as a comic playwright. Shri S. P. Joshi, in the thirties, gave us a delightful comedy called *Khadashtak*. But real work in this field came from the pen of the great humourist, Shri P. K. Atre, in the late thirties and early forties. His *Sāshtānga Namas-kār* which parodied many idiosyncrasies and fashions of the day was a great success. It has not yet lost its charm. Shri Atre is a master of comic situations and characters, and his plays, which are a mixture of the farcical and the satirical, provide a feast of laughter to the audiences. Molière has considerably influenced Marathi dramatic writing ever since the days of Shripad Krishna Kolhatkar, and his influence is seen even in the writings of Atre. P. L. Deshpande has now taken the place of Atre on the Marathi stage, and his plays *Amaldār* an adaptation of Gogol's 'The Inspector-General' and *Tuzé Ahé Tuzyāpāshi*, a delightful satire on the Gandhian type of Acharyas, run to crowded houses, whenever and wherever they are staged. Very recently, Shri S. G. Sathe and Shri Vasant Kanetkar, two of the present-day young playwrights, have given us two successful comedies; of the two *Prema Tuza Ranga Kasa* by Shri Vasant Kanetkar provides delightful comic entertainment. Mention must also be made here of the roaring farces, *Zopi Gelela Jaga Zala* and *Dinuchya Sasubai Radhabai* by Baban Prabhu and *Karayala Gelo Ek* by Baburao Gokhale which have recently been a great success on the amateur stage.

In recent years the one-act play in Marathi is coming into its

own and is steadily building its own independent theatre. A wonderful sense of the comic that many of the young Marathi one-act-playwrights are displaying has helped a good deal to launch it on its new career. Up to the forties there were but a very few, like Anant Kanekar, Madhav Manohar, Shamrao Oak, who practised this genre, but of late a host of writers—many of them young but some of them veterans like Mama Varerkar and Rangnekar are trying their hand in this field and some have produced remarkable humorous skits. Vasant Sabnis, Padmakar Dawre, Vijay Tendulkar are some of the young writers worthy of mention in this connection, but even here the name of P. L. Deshpande stands brilliantly apart. P.L.'s achievements in this genre are really superb. They are not only faultless, but display a range of humorous creation that was rarely witnessed in Marathi dramatic writing. Though satire is the basic motive-force behind all these writings, the varied dramatic forms it takes in them, give it almost a beauty of rainbow colours. P.L.'s *Choté Mase ani Mothé Mase*, *Sadu ani Dādu*, *Sare Kase Shanta Shānta* and other skits provoke laughter which is both innocent and meaningful.

Satire in the form of verse was written as early as the last decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the present century by Shri Gangadhar Ramchandra Mogre. It was political, religious and social satire. Mogre's *Methājichi Majlas* contains satire on the happenings at the famous Surat session of the Congress. His *Abhinavadharma Sthapana* parodies the orthodox religious opinion, whereas his brilliant satirical poem, *Padvichā Pādwa* exposes mercilessly the craving widespread among Government officials and sycophants of the British raj to get their names in the annual birthday honours lists. Mogre used the method that Kolhatkar used in his *Sudāmyāché Pohé*. He created characters that exposed themselves and in turn exposed the class of opinion which they represented. His poems are long and are written in faultless verse.

Shri P. K. Atre who wrote his satirical and humorous verse under the pseudonym, 'Keshavkumar' published his *Zenduchi Fule* in 1925. *Zenduchi Fule* aimed mainly at ridiculing some of the meaningless practices then current in Marathi poetry. *Zenduchi Fule* created quite a stir and in a way brilliantly achieved its purpose. Atre also wrote a number of parodies and verses which can be called purely comic. He got a great following, and a good many writers like Pandit Sapre, Babulnath, Upadhye, in the thirties, took to comic verse writing. *Upahasini*



and *Gajrachya Pungya* are two of the collections of such verse published in the thirties.

A list of all those who tried their hand in this genre and achieved minor successes will be out of place here, but mention must be made of two poetical works by Madhav Julian (Prof. M. T. Patwardhan) which aimed at satire. The first, *Sudharak*, published in 1928, is a social satire. It is a long poem in 18 cantos which exposes the sham found among the well-established in the then middle-class Maharashtrian society. *Sudharak* was followed in 1939 by *Nakulalankar*, another long poem which tried to satirise the then literary world. It could not have a wide appeal, as it caricatured some personalities from that world known only to the poet and his intimate friends. Ever since the advent of Mardhekar in the field of Marathi poetry and the consequential change in its tone, structure and method, modern Marathi poetry has exposed itself to ridicule at the hands of many. During the last fifteen years, thanks to the modernistic trends in modern Marathi poetry, brilliant satirical verse parodying these trends has been written. P. L. Deshpande, Sopandev Choudhari and a host of other writers have written very entertaining parodies. There were till now very few attempts in Marathi to write nonsense-rhymes but during the last five years extremely landable attempts to write rhymes which remind us of the famous nonsense-verse of Lear have been made by Vinda Karandikar, Sadananda Rege, Mangesh Padgaonkar and a few others.

The Marathi Short Story has taken immense strides during the last twenty years and, among other types, has developed and almost perfected one which is extremely entertaining. It usually goes to the villages for characters and events, uses an idiom which almost smells of the earth and adopts a narrative technique very akin to the village gossip. This story has naturally gathered a very large audience. Its eminent exponents are Vyankatesh Madgulkar, Shankar Patil and D. M. Mirasdar. Of the three, Shri Mirasdar has a wonderful sense of the comic and the whimsical, and has presented to the Marathi reading world quite a gallery of village-types. Apart from these extremely entertaining tales of village-types, the modern Marathi short story has also developed a form akin to the one found in H. E. Bates' "My Uncle-Silas" stories. The chief pioneers of this form of the tale are Sadanand Rege and Gangadhar Gadgil. Gangadhar Gadgil has successfully experimented in several types of the short story but is at his best in stories which aim

at social satire. Some of his stories like his *Bhaglelā Chandoba* have a biting sarcasm in them and have no parallel in Marathi short story-writing. He has satirised the modern young man and woman by creating the characters, Bandu and Snehalata, and writing a number of stories around them.

The travelogue in Marathi is steadily changing its nature. It is no longer a mere account of the travel or of places of interest seen in travel. It is no longer following a set pattern. It is assuming the form of observations, commentary, gossip and other kinds of intimate talk that we usually associate with the personal essay. And this transformation that has taken place in the nature of the travelogue has given us during the last fifteen or twenty years writing which is very entertaining. It is full of that quaintly humorous touch which is always very individualistic. Shri N. C. Kelkar wrote his delightful *Simla-Varnan* in this vein. Atre tried his hand at it in the thirties but gave up the pursuit. Anant Kanekar can be said to be a real pioneer in this form and he has now been followed by Gangadhar Gadgil, R. B. Joshi and a host of other writers whose travelogues are read more for the rich, entertaining minds they reveal than for the information they try to convey. I cannot conclude this paragraph without a mention of two travelogues written in recent years. The first, called *Lok ani Loukik*, written by Shri Jaiwant Dalvi during his journey in the United States is a work of an observant humourist. It is written in a vein which is tolerant yet shrewd, sarcastic yet sympathetic, wise yet curious. The second is *Apurvai* written by the inimitable P. L. Deshpande. It purports to give an account of P.L.'s recent travel and stay abroad, but the impression it leaves behind is not of the places that P.L. visited but of the mind with that wonderful sense of the ludicrous that all through speaks to us.

Marathi journalistic writing, especially of the weeklies, became very colourful and inventive in the twenties mainly due to the imaginative efforts of Achutrao Kolhatkar. Kolhatkar, who was an inventive genius, introduced several very novel features into Marathi journalistic writing which gained immediate popularity. These were mainly in the nature of political comment, but they had an element of satire in them which immediately caught fire. Reading of the weeklies became a social habit to which the Maharashtrian mind is still an addict. Anantrao Gadre, M. G. Rangnekar, 'Alamgeer', Shamrao Oak, Kanekar and a number of extremely imaginative journalists in

the thirties followed the way Achutrao showed and lent variety and colour to the journalistic writing done in the weeklies.

The forties saw the rise of a brilliant journalist who had an inventive ability almost unparalleled in the history of Marathi weekly journalism. He was a free-lance who could produce at the shortest notice almost anything from a comic poem to a full length dramatic parody. He has given the Marathi reader a wealth of humorous writing, rather ephemeral by nature but almost baffling in its range, wit and power of invention. Dattu Bandekar was a rare phenomenon in Marathi weekly journalism. He was almost a co-editor of *Navyug*, a weekly with which the name of the great Marathi humourist Atre is associated as editor. Atre has made the Marathi people laugh much more than any other writer in recent years and it can also be said that Marathi journalistic writing in his hands has also reached heights and depths it had never reached before. Marathi humorous writing as reflected in Marathi journalism has during the last twenty-five years touched levels which it is not sometimes easy to imagine. Marathi journalism, both of the weeklies and of the dailies, has since the days of Chiplunkar, Tilak, Shivrampant Paranjpe and Achutrao Kolhatkar been all along very critical, pungent and biting and it has not strayed much from this glorious tradition during the last 15 years of Swaraj. Atre and H. R. Mahajani are some of the editors whose papers are read as much, if not more, for their spicy editorials as for the news they try to flash.

Humour thus finds expression in different forms of writing in Marathi; but it must be said that modern Marathi humorous writing cannot boast of a comic novel. V. V. Bokil and a few others did try their hand at it but have failed. An attempt to write a satirical novel modelled roughly on Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* was made by Shri V. V. Shirwadkar, alias Kusumagraja, in his *Kalpanéchyā Teerāwar*, but it was only partially successful. Marathi fictional writing has yet to produce a comic and also a satirical novel. One is also forced to make another observation. Taking stock of all the humorous writing in Marathi, done during the last 75 years, one is impressed by the bulk of satire that Marathi humorists have produced. The mainsprings of Marathi humour seem to lie not so much in human nature as in the social behaviour of man. The Marathi humorist has all along been interested in the social aspect of Maharashtrian life. He has not to that extent been interested in the incongruities of human nature. He has all along been



suspicious of the gods that came to be worshipped, the opinions that came to be held in high esteem, the literary fashions that came to have a large following and the modes of social behaviour that came to be taken for granted. It was the social phenomenon that all the time engaged his attention.

It is no wonder therefore that the Marathi mind even from the times of Tukaram is more inclined to produce satire than pure humour. It has no doubt helped to keep the Marathi social mind always alert and watchful; but it has also, to some extent been responsible for the general tendency, observed even among Marathi critics, to mistake satire for humour. It is precisely against this background that Professor C. V. Joshi's writings stand a little apart. They provide us with examples of pure humour.

The only other great name that leaps up in the mind when we think of pure humour is that of Shrimati Laxmibai Tilak, the almost illiterate wife of the poet, N. V. Tilak. Laxmibai's *Smrutichitre* is a book of memoirs written by an observant mind, untutored and unschooled, but overflowing with the milk of human kindness. It is a mind with such a profound sense of humour that not only can it laugh at itself—and it does this all through the book—but has a wonderful capacity to lend charm to a life full of disappointments, struggles and hardships. It is a book that has almost attained the status of a classic in modern Marathi Literature. But these are noteworthy exceptions. The Marathi mind is naturally inclined to satire. One is therefore forced to say that Marathi humorous writing can boast of wit, epigram, sarcasm, irony, invective and satire; but has yet to do much in the field of pure humour.



# HUMOUR

## MODERN MALAYALAM

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By T. N. GOPINATHAN NAIR

**M**ALAYALAM can claim to have a proud tradition in humorous literature. The very source of Manipravala style which is a happy blend of Malayalam and Sanskrit words is believed to be humour. Again, humour is the very life of *Koothu* and *Koodiyattam*, two of the dramatic art-forms of ancient Kerala. The *Koothu* is a solo-dance-cum-narrative performance by the traditional actor, Chakyar; and *Koodiyattam* is an early indigenous form of presenting Sanskrit plays. The most popular character in the latter type of performance is the Vidooshaka. Both the Chakyar and the Vidooshaka are past-masters as entertainers and their humour ranges from timely wit to pointed satire. In the annals of *Koodiyattam*, the most colourful Vidooshaka was Thola, to whom are attributed some of the most daring essays in verbal jugglery and gymnastics. The Champu Prabandhas composed between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, and other works in Manipravala, most of which are erotic, also abound in humour.

Then came Kunchan Nambiar, who may justly be described as the greatest humorist of Malayalam literature. He was the founder and first exponent of Thullal, a solo dance which represents and interprets a puranic story rendered in a continuous series of songs. The peculiarity of this art-form is that the artist sings, and interprets what he sings through his dance. Nambiar composed, sang and danced. There is hardly a theme that has not exercised the fancies of this arch jester. And to this day the sixty odd Thullal compositions he has left behind are the greatest store-house of humour in all its variations. It is again the abundant presence of rich and genuine humour that might save from an otherwise deserved oblivion at least a few of the erotic effusions of the highly gifted Namboodiris of Chelapparambu, Venmoni and Seevolli. The Datyoocha Sandesham (Owl-message), a parody which Sivolli wrote to stem the tide of insipid *Sandeshas* (message-poems) and the *Chakki Chankaram*, a burlesque written by Munshi Rama

Kurup, condemning third rate drama are memorable as satires. The *Chakki Chankaram* dealt a lethal blow on "the heads of poetasters who came rushing like cart-bullocks".

Prose literature broke out into new channels as a result of contacts with English literature. Humour which was confined until then in poetic form could now permeate the new forms in prose as well. Thus novels, farces, essays and features were all brightened up by its magic touch.

C. V. Raman Pillai, who is popularly styled the "Scott of Malayalam", reveals himself as a humorist also, in his famous historical romances and his comedies. So does O. Chandu Menon in his social novels *Indulekha* and *Sarada*. Both were men of deep insight and understanding. If they were quick to note human foibles, they were too large-hearted to get angry with them; they laughed instead. They have touched the whole gamut of humour from hilarious, side-splitting burlesque to the silent smile of thoughtful amusement which is born of the very springs of tears.

Vengayil Kunjuraman Nayanar, well-known by his pen-name "Kesari", was a pioneer essayist. As editor of periodicals like the *Kerala Sanchari* and *Kerala Patrika* he has presented to Malayalam literature some unforgettable humorous characters like the *nattezhuthachan*, that is to say, the village school master. In the writings of Appan Thampuran, P. K. Narayana Pillai and Vallathol also—they are men of a serious turn of mind—there is a subtle undercurrent of humour.

But it was with "Sanjayan" and E. V. Krishna Pillai that humorous literature became an accepted form of writing and came into its own. "Sanjayan" (M. R. Nair) was a scholar, but it was as the editor of a humorous journal of the same name that he made literary history. What tickled him most were contemporary problems, and parody and satire were his forte. Thus the rationalist, the Calicut Municipality and mystic poetry—all were grist to the mill of his satirical genius. Of course, there was no malice in his writings. Though they were often extremely trenchant and sometime even devastating, they were aimed only at men's weaknesses and evils, never at the men themselves.

E. V. Krishna Pillai was a member of the Legislative Assembly, a lawyer, an actor, a playwright, a speaker and so on. He fully exploited the humorous potentialities of various spheres in which he moved. As a Lawyer he could easily visualise how a poet of Kerala and his creations would fare in a Court of Law presided over by a Judge who is blissfully ignorant of Malayalam.



As a member of the Legislative Assembly for many years, he could vividly picture the humorous situations which semi-literate, unsophisticated, up-country members would create in the Assembly. He even visualised the emergence of an agency which sold ready-made speeches to these worthy ninnies. And when one of them pompously rises with one such ready-made speech, and confidently reads it without realising that the pages have not been put together in their serial order: Well, one can imagine the stupendous absurdities that he would let off one after another in quick succession. E.V.'s collection of essays, *Chiriyum Chintayum*, (Laughter and Reflection) bears testimony to his unrivalled powers of observation and his uncanny eye for the absurd and the ludicrous. Theatres reverberated with hearty laughter whenever his comedies were staged.

E.V. was out and out a humorist. He was determined to laugh and raise laughter. While Sanjayan approached human foibles like a high-minded moralist, E.V. approached them like an inspired jester. Sanjayan wanted to rid the world of its foibles; E.V. would have fled the world if it had no foibles in it to entertain him and make life worth living.

Yet another writer of hilarious comedies is N. P. Chellappan Nair. His works like *The Atom Bomb*, *It. Nani*, *Phisachukkalude Nattil* (In the land of Devils) etc. are very popular. He paints his characters in strong colours, and his art borders on the burlesque. But there is no doubting its power to expose social and political disfigurations and maladies that mar the face and sap the life of the nation.

Parody is a significant form of humorous literature, and is bound to be entertaining when the originals that are parodied are well-known pieces. In Malayalam the more outstanding modern poets, Vallathol, Ulloor, Asan and G. Sankara Kurup have been consummately parodied by 'Seetharaman'. Madhavaji and Meesan are the other well-known parodists.

Among the short story writers, Basheer and Karur have a genuine and abundant sense of humour. According to Basheer, a violent out-break of itch among all the political leaders of the world is the most effective insurance against war, for it will leave them no time to think of war! *Nataka krithu* (The Playwright) of P. Kesava Dev is an excellent satire on professional actors, and his *Manthriyakkalle* (Don't make a Minister) and *Thaskara Sangham* (Gang of Thieves) are powerful political satires. N. K. Achari and Thikkodiyar (P. K. Nair) are two rising humorists who have to their credit a number of light

sketches and plays many of which have provided rich entertainment to all Malayalees through Akashvani. (All India Radio)

Puthezhattu Raman Menon, E. M. Kovoov, Anaṇḍakuttan, Karthikeyan and K. P. Panthalam are masters of the light essay. *Katalasu-manthri* (Paper-Minister) and *Amruthanjanam* of Anandakuttan, *Hani Puranam* (the epic of the 'honeys') of E. M. Kovoov and *Kirukkukal* (Eccentricities) of Karthikeyan have provoked many a hearty laugh among our reading public. Panchu Menon and Kunchi Amma, two inimitable creations of P. K. Raja Raja Varma have justly endeared themselves to all readers. Among the younger generation of humorists, mention may be made of Veloor Krishnankutty, K. S. Krishnan, Vikraman, D.C., Veeran, etc.

There is a good market for humorous literature, thanks to the many weeklies and magazines in circulation. More than half a dozen of them publish light writing only. An unhealthy trend is the production of so much ephemeral writing on contemporary themes. Depth is lost in the quest for wide coverage. It seems that this is an unfortunate trend in most Indian literatures.

# HUMOUR

## MODERN ORIYA

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By GOPAL CHANDRA MISRA

THE HUMOROUS writings of Fakirmohan Senapati in the early years of the 20th century, in the form of his novels and short stories are exceedingly delightful. All the novels such as *Chhaman Athaguntha* (Land measuring six Manas and eight Gunthas), *Mamu* (Uncle), *Lachhama* (a historical work), *Pryashita* (Compensation) are one connected whole and these are worked out with great vigour and carefulness of treatment of humour. Several passages particularly at the beginning of his novels and short stories have introduced humour and satire of unsurpassed dignity and sublimity. His language is simple and at the same time powerful. In satirising literary fashions he has presented a group of exquisite characters like the feudal oppressor, Ramachandra Mangaraj, Champa, the village maid-servant, Gobara Jena (the village Chaukidar). Fakirmohan's characters are drawn from real life and thus their language and their behaviour remain amusing and intelligible. This celebrated author has criticised the old beliefs and institutions and thus a desire to amend every false system by castigating it is easily noticeable.

As for the humour of his popular works, it has observed human frailty indulgently but a note of sympathy and reform is struck in it. It is often said that Fakirmohan's sense of humour is limited to a particular purpose. In his short story *Rebati*, the old grand-mother is depicted as one having some recognisable qualities and also defects of temperament which have a special relation to the sense of humour. "Patent Medicine"—one of the best conceived short stories of Fakirmohan exhibit his striking talents. It has represented two prevalent modes of thoughts or streams of opinion, one is pure humour and the second purpose is reform or amendment of society. Fakirmohan laughs at men and women equally.

Oriya literature which has stupendous achievements to its credit in the different fields of poetry, essay, drama and novel, surprisingly excels itself in the sphere of humour. In Oriya



literature the origin of humour is hidden in the basic and fundamental attitude of society towards virtue and vice, truth and falsehood. The entire humorous writing of the modern period beginning with Fakirmohan Senapati, Radhanath Rai and Madhusudan Rao has its root in the voluminous literary compositions of the early days. Though the bulk of the earliest compositions was religious in character, occasional writings strewn with humour and satire were not lacking. Our inexhaustible fund of folk tales exhibit humour, wit and satire, and the folk-tales like—*Ghakuliapanda Katha* (The Story of the Beggar-Brahmin), *Chari Sangat Katha* (The Story of Four Friends), give a light and bright tone to the fallen spirit, the talks when narrated create a soul under the ribs of death. Humour in the ancient Oriya writings of Sarala Das, Batchha Das and many others serves to preserve our brightness of heart and elasticity of spirit. *Kalasa Choutisa* which narrates the marriage of Lord Siva with Parvati, daughter of the Himalayas, is significant so far as simple humour and laughter is concerned. *Chatura Binod* by Brajanath Badajena (a collection of four long stories) modelled on the line of ancient tales, an authentic prose work of the 18th century, is based on simple humour and satire. The historical evolution of this much loved art that is humour often runs from complexity to simplicity and again points boldly to the development of Oriya prose. That humour proceeds from a purpose, either that of criticising the oddities and peculiarities of an individual or attacking the weakness of society through the mysterious ambiguity of language is proved in *Chatura Binod*. The contemporary luxurious court life, the surrounding flatterers, the prince and princess, form the very basis of the characteristic humour of Brajanath Badjena. The verses strewn throughout the body of the stories are most charmingly humorous. Marriage and all other social customs have been treated with sympathy and a sort of pity.

*Chatura Binod* as a humorous composition may be described as the first flower upon a branch that was to bear blossoms of a deeper colour in subsequent days. Similarly, Jadumani Mahapatra is another powerful and conscious humorist in the 19th century who by the exercise of his imagination has worked wonders in the field. His acquaintance with the contemporary royal Darbars has become meaningful so far as he has held an important place half way between the preacher and the wit. His satire, irony and parody had the purpose of a preacher but

he employed the weapons of a reformer. Definitely a matter of taste and justice on the part of the individual talented humorist like Jadumani Mahapatra, he exposes nothing but what is cognisable and makes a due discrimination between those who are and those who are not proper objects of it. There are several lyrical compositions like *Jadumani Rahasya* (humour of Jadumani) which shows him as a master of the form of verse satire. Jadumani by his sharp wit, intelligence and satire has performed greater service to the cause of humour by preparing a mould into which a later genius like Fakirmohan and others could pour more ore.

Kavi Surya Baladev Rath, eminently a lyrical genius, sometimes adopted humour as noticed in the dialogue of Radha Krishna and Lalita. Brajanath Badajena are Jadumani Mahapatra are great humorists in their way in the sphere of pure, unalloyed laughter. A little before the dawn of the modern era in Oriya literature, in the wake of the 20th century, a group of miscellaneous authors and dramatists appeared whose occasional humorous compositions filled up the void. Pandit Gobind Rath's *Haria Tanti* is a humorous verse-tale, Vikari Charan Pattanaik's dramatic works and the novels of Rama Sankar Ray reflect pure and simple humour.

Even Radhanath Rai (1848-1908) a first rank poet and pioneer of the modern era in Oriya literature has demonstrated the value of irony and satire in his celebrated composition *Darbar*. In this *Kavya*, with its social and political ring, the author has clearly criticised the pompous imperial Durbar which was held in the Barabati Fort in the year 1897 to confer Titles and Honours upon selected flatterers. The temporary halo, the so-called flatterers, the vanity of the feudal rulers, have become the concrete examples of Radhanath's humour.

The poet has exposed in very powerful language the fallacy and futility of such Durbars. A sane and sensible man cannot but agree with Radhanath Rai in this view. Before the threshold is crossed, there remain the poets Madhusudan Rao and Gangadhar Meher to be considered. But examples of humour in their writings are few. Madhusudan once satirised the frantic efforts of a few individuals to reform the language and literature while Gangadhar Meher with tears in his eyes and boldness of mind criticised the British administration of justice. But the history of humour in Oriya literature in the modern period is curious. Fakirmohan is believed to be the pioneer in the field while Gopal Chandra Praharaj, Laxmikanta Mahapatra,

Baishnab Pani and several others worked to bring in the golden age of Oriya humour.

Gopal Chandra Praharaj's greatness and his fame rest on his adventures in this art of humour. His books *Nanaka Bastani* (The Diary of an Old Father), *Bai Mohanti Panji* (The Chronicles of Bai Mohanti), *Bhagabat Tungire Sandhya* (Evening in the Village Temple) are the immortal treasure houses of laughter, humour, irony and satire, all combined to bring out prominently the main objectives of this much practised art. There is real poetic wit in the several literary accounts of Gopal Chandra Praharaj. He puts forth a grave charge against the present sophisticated society, the present-day civilisation concentrated in material happiness and the prosperity of individuals. There never was a better humorist than Gopal Chandra Praharaj. He had watched with great diligence and care the mysterious operations of human nature and he successfully recorded the effects of opinions, interest and passion. Praharaja was all along careful not to be deceived by the outward appearance of this so-called modern civilisation and education. Very blunt, direct and always honest, Praharaja was eager enough to satirise everything, but in doing so he considered facts rather than gossip. It is true Fakirmohan laid the foundation, but Gopal Praharaj went much further. He might not have written novels and short stories in the modern sense but his essays and sketches are all drawn in a humorous and satirical vein. It is all so abundant, so specific, so instinct with the breath of life that none can escape its undeniable influence. In one of his essays, Sri Praharaja has described in vivid language the classification of mangoes into sour and sweet concluding that human beings in their mutual relations are no less than mangoes, classified as above. The trick he has employed shows his supreme gift. In advocating the spread of female education in the country, Praharaj, the humorist, has suggested that the immediate result would be the extinction of the class of goldsmiths and bangle-sellers. In very powerful language, he observes that Gopal Chandra Praharaja is nearer the truth in his humour and satire. Therefore, both Fakirmohan and Gopal Chandra Praharaja are humorists of great significance and each one of them had in view the reform of Indian society's social and political evils.

The differences thus demonstrated between Brajanath Badjena, Jadumoni Mahapatra, Fakirmohan Senapati and Gopal Chandra Praharaj are undoubtedly due to the ages in



which they lived. Laxmikanta Mahapatra, popularly known as *Kanta Kavi* is the greatest parodyist in Oriya. To read a passage or two from his *Dagar* (Messenger, an Oriya magazine) is to find traces of unrivalled skill. His *Chalak Chandrahas Champu* makes his outstanding contribution to humour, which remains unplumbed, uncharted. Nothing has stirred the imagination of Oriya readers so vividly as the compositions of Laxmikanta, appearing every month in the pages of *Dagar*. He wrote in *Panchamruta* and his humour is recognised for its subtlety, richness and variety. Baishnab Pani's dramatic compositions are replete with humour, drawn from rustic life.

Pandit Utkalmoni Gopabandhu Das and Godavarish Misra rarely produced humour. The writers of the thirties are concerned more with their poesy and socialistic philosophy than with anything else. But in the years after 1940 Oriya humour has exhibited different phases of development. The political and social elements as evinced in Oriya humour clearly point to its inseparableness from the life current of the people who are great builders, thinkers and lovers of art. Oriya writers on humour have both seriousness and ecstasy.

In the modern period, Sri Godavarish Mahapatra, Editor of *Niankhunta*, Sri Nityananda Mahapatra, Editor of *Dagar*, have in their exceptional genius practised humorous writing most successfully. Sri Godavarish Mahapatra's short stories, occasional writings and lyrical compositions are characterised by a high sense of humour and satire. A new species of humour and satire are traced in his writings where intellect and imaginations have been fused together. His short stories such as *Mu Dine Mantri Thili*, *Ebe Madhya Banchichhi*, and lyrics like *He Mor Kalam*, *Handisalar Biplab* have scanned new horizons full of humour and satire alone.

Faturananda (Ram Chandra Misra) is a most gifted humorist and satirist. Every work from his pen provides a perpetual feast of unmixed humour. *Nakata Chitrakar* (a disfigured artist), *Heresa* (a collection of short stories), and *Sahitya Chasa* reflect in a most humorous manner his reactions to the present-day life. *Nakata Chitrakar* speaks of an artist, forsaken and forgotten by selfish society. Sunil Mohan Misra, a regular feature writer of *Dagar*, has very ably established himself as a high ranking humorist. No political event in the country, no institution has escaped the satirical touch of his pen. Humour has served him as the grand vehicle of thought that his writings provide us with. So many external factors have influenced consciously or

unconsciously the imagination of present-day humorists. Most humorous writings centre on the political exploitation of the ignorant, illiterate masses and on social taboos. No doubt, within such a limited range, writers like Godavarish Mahapatra, Nityananda Mahapatra, Faturananda, Soni Mohan Misra, Mohapatra Nilamani Sahoo, Krushna Prasad Basu have painted the subtle shades and varieties of human nature and emotion. In doing so humour has been characterised by deep human sympathy, insight and dexterity. Dev Mahapatra who once edited *Kumkum* from Bombay is distinguished for his extraordinary humour in his stories and essays. With clarity of mind and simplicity of style the modern humorist writers have been able to achieve noteworthy successes in the field. In many cases their humour has a didactic and political aim. Dramatists like Kabicharan Patnaik, Gopal Chhotrai, Laxmidhar Nayak and Udayanath Misra have adopted humour to popularise some theme or other. Bat Krushan Das, Bat Krushna Praharaj, Udayanath Sarangi, Jatbandhu Mohapatra and Bhagaban Pati are noted for their humorous compositions.

# HUMOUR

## MODERN PANJABI

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By PRITAM SINGH

**I**T MAY seem a little odd for one to begin a survey of humour in an Indian language with an anecdote not strictly indigenous. But, with your permission, I am taking the liberty and hope you will very kindly bear with me.

Here is that piece of non-Panjabi humour:

A moody Frenchman, who was strolling along a busy London street, suddenly began to spin his walking-stick round his index finger. As misfortune would have it, the slightly elongated nose of an Englishman happened to jut into the trajectory of the fast-moving stick exactly when the latter was hurtling down with full force. There was the inevitable collision of the French stick with the English nose and the bruised, confused Englishman snapped back at the Frenchman to stop the damned rotation of the stick.

"Why?" said the Frenchman, not quite used to such prohibitive commands, "I am a free Frenchman and shall do as I like."

"But," retorted the injured Englishman, "you must know, monsieur, that while you are in England, your freedom ends, where my nose begins!"

The story does not proceed further, though I am sure that even this over-wrought, touchy Frenchman must have been completely disarmed by the witticism of an ordinary English pedestrian. But, may I presume, you will all agree with me that the consequences would have been pretty serious, if the same carefree stick had made a similar contact with a Panjabi nose! Some of my friends here may already be picturing to themselves some gory scenes and I will let them, but I shall request them not to conclude, even for a moment, that the Panjabis have no sense of humour or that they are deficient in the appreciation of wit. No, on the contrary, they are known for their immediate, loud and boisterous response to ticklish situations and for their quick eye for the incongruous and the odd. I need not dilate here upon their jovial nature, but the type of humour that saved the situation both for the Englishman and the French-



man—the tolerant, pervasive, tranquilising humour—does not seem to be characteristic of the Panjabi people.

They can easily laugh at or laugh with you but you will find them qualitatively different if you ever try to laugh at *them*. To permit others to laugh at you or to laugh with others at yourself, a certain training of mental reflexes is absolutely necessary. Moreover, mild, sophisticated humour presupposes civil and consistent cultivation of language over a long, continued period of time. We, in the Panjab, have not had many opportunities to train our reflexes to the desirable extent on account of our inexorable geographical and historical situation, requiring readily resistible character. Again, till only recently, the Panjabi language had neither tasted the patronage of the government, nor that of the High Court, and in fact, not even that of the University. The verbal art in the Panjab remained at the folk-level, during the Mohammadan, the Sikh and the British periods, because Panjabi was never officially admitted into the Courts. Then, excepting the religious places, there were no public places, where intellectuals could gather to sharpen their wits. The absence of any satisfactory stage, worth the name, also contributed to the uncongenial atmosphere for the cultivation of bright dialogue and verbal passages-at-arms. To all these may be added the secondary place accorded to humour in literature, by our classical aesthetics.

It was on account of such conditions that the sort of humour which the classicists called *Samit* is rare, *Upahasit* is extant, but *Atthās* is abundant. Probably the same is the case with all other Indian languages also, but that provides hardly any consolation. Our regret is that neither the quality nor the quantity of humour obtaining in Panjabi life has been faithfully or adequately recorded in Panjabi literature of the pre- or the post-British period.

For the purposes of a survey like this, the modern period in Panjabi literature may be taken to date from the advent of the British. The uses to which humour has been put in post-British Panjabi literature, the status that it has steadily come to acquire and the methods of the humorist can mostly be traced to British patterns. For example, the role of humour in the tragi-comedies of I. C. Nanda and the tragedies of Harcharan Singh was a direct borrowing from Shakespeare. Addison's Roger de Coverley served as the prototype for Charan Singh Shahid's genial fumbler, Bābā Warvama. The light essay and the essay in which the comic and the pathetic mingle inextricably

cably had, clearly, English models before them and Sanskrit humour had little to do with it. The outrageous obscenity and cynicism of Mela Ram, the realistic dialogue of Shardha Ram and the jovial narration of Dr Charan Singh form the first store of humour in Panjabi literature of the last 150 years.

Mela Ram was the product of the early British occupation days and preached that the pleasure of the senses was the *summum bonum* of life. He excelled in evoking laughter by his unexpected perversity and confined his humour to the genitals. His interpretation of the Ramayana must, really, have shocked some of his contemporaries. According to him the root cause of the whole trouble is the sex-hungry Sita, who preferring the more virile and potent Ravana to a weak Rama, forces herself upon Ravana. Goaded, more by his excited libido than by injured pride, Rama roams about madly, asking the trees and animals the whereabouts of the partner of his bed. It is a mistake to read any spiritual meanings in the story, warns Mela Ram, because the whole false superstructure has been built by Brahmins for the sake of their livelihood! Mela Ram stands by himself, as a solitary example of such humour in the whole range of our literature. His work *Anubhava Prakash* has not been published so far, for obvious reasons.

Pandit Shardha Ram began to write in Panjabi not by choice but by accident. He was commissioned by the then Governor of the Panjab to prepare a short history of the Sikhs for the use of the British. On another occasion he was advised by a Christian missionary, the Revd. Dr. John Newton to produce a text-book in such a way that the foreign readers may know everything worth knowing, about the dialects, customs and characteristics of the Panjabi people. He prepared two books *Sikhhān De Rāj Dī Vithia* (An Account of Sikh Rule) and *Panjābī Bāt Chīt* (Panjabi Dialogues). It is in the latter book, mainly, that the writer's capacity to copy the ways of our speech and his proficiency in reproducing the comic situations of our everyday rural or urban life, was made manifest. There is, in this small book, a pervading comic sense, not intent on forcing a moral upon the readers, but on providing sheer entertainment. The mock-anger of women at the use of sly, equivocal language by the hawking street-vendors, the drollery of brawls at rural festivals, the inevitable meleé on the occasion of the Kumbha at Hardawar, the very interesting meeting of an unlettered peasant with an Englishman in which the effort of one to make himself understood to the other

makes confusion worse confounded—scenes like these are many. There is an all-round colloquial brightness in the book which reproduces zestfully the uninhibited abandon of the rural scene.

Shardha Ram is followed by Dr Charan Singh. His book *Maharani Sharab Kaur* was written with a clear anti-intoxicant purpose. Wine is the Maharani upon whom her sycophants like opium, tobacco and other toxic drugs dance attendance. Turn by turn, each courtier is subjected to a severe caricature of the following type: Some opium-eaters, going out of the village, on business, find the heat unbearable and decide to rest near a well. They find the surroundings so inviting that they fail to resist the temptation of taking an additional dose of their favourite drug. Meanwhile the sun having shifted its position and they being affected directly by the rays of the sun, meet in a little conference, and decide to shift the well to the shade with the help of ropes. As soon as they are in positions, ready for the great pull, stupor overtakes them and when in the late afternoon they rise to find the well, covered with shade, they are left with no other option but to celebrate their historic victory with further doses of the drug!

The second phase of humour began with the greater vogue of the press and the socio-religious renaissance of the late 19th century. The anti-British feeling among people was to a very great extent allowed to fritter away in chauvinistic attempts of various religious groups to establish the superiority of their own doctrines over others. Public debates were held to bring home this imagined superiority. Evidently there was great scope for ready wit to flourish at such forums because vulgar jibe and not argument spelled victory. Journalists began to make generous use of ridicule and sarcasm, rarely of a high standard and often deteriorating to abuse. However, various pleasing anecdotes relating to this period are preserved, mostly, in the memory of the people.

Realising the great possibilities of journalism in the field of humour, Shri Charan Singh 'Shahīd' established a weekly called *Mauji* (The Carefree), exclusively dedicated to humour. Charan Singh 'Shahīd', was a prolific writer of humorous verse, short stories, sketches and dialogues and set the hunger of his readers on edge so that the issues of his journal were always immediately exhausted. In Panjabi, his name is synonymous with humour, which was mostly situational and was used to draw a moral.

Charan Singh Shahīd's book, *Badshahian* (Regalities), has been popular among people of all tastes. His *Shahn-Shahian* and



*Be Parwahian* both collections of poems in a lighter vein, have been posthumously published.

Almost contemporaneously with Charan Singh Shaheed, Mr. Lal Singh began to send his despatches from Europe to a popular monthly called *Phulwari* under the pseudonym 'Kamlā Akālī'. (As an aside, I may be permitted to share a joke with you about this pseudonym. *Kamla* in Panjabi means demented so that the pseudonym means "the demented Akali". A wit is reported to have enquired from him once: when you are ready to call yourself an Akali, is there really any need for pre-fixing it with a superfluous adjective like 'Kamlā'?) Kamlā Akālī's despatches had a different style altogether from the horse play of Charan Singh 'Shahīd'. His keen and sympathetic observation, his easy, unadorned style, and the pervading undercurrent of humour were something new to Panjabi. These despatches were later published in the form of a book which is rightly regarded in Panjabi as a model travelogue.

Drama is a very important medium for the cultivation and refinement of wit and humour. In this field also, as soon as playwriting was taken up seriously by Ishwar Chander Nanda, a teacher of English by profession, comedies, modelled on Shakespeare, came into being. His *Lily Dā Viāh* (Lily's marriage) mocks at the pseudo-sophisticated, anglicised parents whose only condition for the prospective son-in-law is a return from England. Nanda, who is affectionately spoken of as the Dad of Panjabi Drama, although Shri Brij Lal Shastri was his precursor in this art, has the art of highlighting oddities. For intellectual, aphoristic and witty dialogue, nobody is the match of Sant Singh Sekhon, another of our playwrights.

In some of Harcharan Singh's plays like *Khedan De Din Chār* (Few Are The Days of Merrymaking) a bright, open-air atmosphere, full of fun and frolic, prevails. A thoroughly enjoyable situation is created by planting an unlettered, robust rural girl in a highly urbanized household. Almost all the playwrights make use of the artifice of confused identity to create laughter. For instance, Gurdial Singh Khosla, in his *Juttian Da Jora* (A Pair of Shoes) creates an interesting domestic situation when the wife discovers a pair of feminine shoes in her husband's car, without, of course, realising that the husband may be altogether above suspicion. Balwant Gargi, in his one-act-play *Dr. Palta*, creates a highly entertaining situation exposing, at the same time, the tricks of the trade of so-called experts.

In verse, Ishar Singh "Ishar" the creator of a new character,

Bhāiyā, holds the popular field. In one of his poems the Bhāiyā feigns death. A brutal description of the fake-grief and real greed of friends and relatives is given in detail. To the sudden horror of all, the Bhāiyā wakes up! Bhaiya often relates stories of how he made a mess of things and how he found himself in the soup. A master of repartee, Gurdev Singh Maan, a burly, stocky peasant, whose store of humorous tit-bits is inexhaustible, tops in writing parodies of contemporary poets.

We do not have much humour in our novels, except that Nanak Singh in some of his novels introduces light relief as well as entertainment in the form of a comic character. So does Jaswant Singh Kanwal. But in short stories, anecdotes, sketches and articles we have a number of humorists. Gurnam Singh Teer and Piara Singh Data are two such specialised writers. In one of his recent anecdotal narratives, Gurnam Singh Teer, describes how the sudden discovery of a Muhammadan name, inscribed on a jug in use, in the kitchen of the writer, creates a first-rate crisis because the cook at once finds his dear religion in serious danger. "A friend of mine", he says, "indulged in gambling, theft, illicit love and rioting, was jailed, had long drinking sessions, smoked opium, visited the houses of ill-fame and committed the worst of crimes, but, believe me, he never, never even once, let his strong grip over his religion, loosen. And, if he was so unrelenting in his religion, why should I be lax?"

For soft, light touches, catholic feeling and classic prose, I shall mention only one name—that of the late Principal Teja Singh. Author of only a few essays, he was the founder of a new type of essay which was light without being loose, created laughter without being cheap and was scholarly without being burdensome. Taking up trifles like *Vihlian Gallan* (Purposeless Gossip), he dealt with them from some fresh angle. Restrained and cultured, he had, nonetheless, a quick eye for the lighter aspects of life.

Another writer, Ishwar Singh, an artist by profession, has written light prose. He had the making of a fine humorist, as exhibited in his *Gall Bat* (Conversations) and *Kalam Di Awaz* (The Voice of the Pen) but unfulfilled ambitions in art set him on a wild goose chase in the streets of London with the result that, for the present, Panjabi writing has lost a budding literary humorist.

With Balwant Gargi's *Nimm De Pattey* (Leaves of the Neem Tree) the formalistic, venerative, non-humorous type of sketch writing has come to an end. Pungent and gripping in his style.

figurative and picturesque in his imagination and selective in his language and material, Balwant fixes his contemporaries in settings out of which it will be difficult for his readers to imagine them. In spite of the occasional tendentious lapses, smacking of partiality or injustice, *Nimm De Pattey* provides literary fare of a distinctly high standard in humorous-cum-serious sketch writing. But in quality and tonal effect the humour of Suba Singh and Giani Gurdit Singh is a bit different from all these and I would therefore like to refer to them separately. Suba Singh is versatile. He writes verse, short stories, light essays, travelogues, etc. with equal ease. In any literary get-together his mere appearance on the stage sets off peals of laughter from the audience. He has the knack of converting the tensest of situations into ridiculously comic ones with a single remark. He was till lately a columnist in a newspaper and endeared himself to his readers through that medium but has now joined the Public Relations Department of the Panjab Government. Suba Singh is the greatest benefactor of the criminals, the mentally retarded, the deformed, the odd and the unusual specimens of human society because he delineates them sympathetically. Strange characters flit through his work like the European madam who as soon as she is sure of the power of her charm over Indian people, manages to avail of the free services of the washerman, the tailor or the cobbler and succeeds in procuring small articles of daily use, in return for a clever use of her smiles, pats and handshakes and by permitting the amorous looks of these gentlemen to stay upon her for a comparatively longer period. Another character is that of an addict who lives on snake bites because no other intoxicant is good enough to give him the required feel. He has written a complete parody of the Panjabi classic *Heer Ranjha* of Waris Shah, which is bound to be very popular, specially with rural readers, as soon as it is published.

The other writer Giani Gurdit Singh has not had the benefit of regular schooling. Therefore, when he writes about the rural scene, from which he himself hails, his style and observations are fresh, without affectation, and unsophisticated. He is a good example of the indigenous humorist of the Shardha Ram type, recapturing with his observing eyes and ears all that is worth observing in the village. His recent book, *Mera Pind* (My Village) has been acclaimed as one of the best books of its kind in Panjabi. With great bouyancy, he narrates, through the mouth of this or that character, sprightly little anecdotes that



fly about in every rural get-together, whether it is round the common street fire in winter or under the great Banyan tree at noon time in the summer.

In drawing up a scene, in sizing up a character, in presenting a dialogue, Gurdit Singh keeps his sly running commentary alive. A gentle vein of satire runs through the whole book in the very beginning of which he says that his little village is destined to be the new centre of attraction for world tourists because it happens to be the only rural site in India, sampling in its pristine, unadulterated, ancient glory the utter backwardness, which once stalked the whole of this great country of ours!

Contemporary Panjabi literature has discovered in satire a powerful instrument of social reform. Almost all the major writers have made use of it, but those with pronounced leanings towards the left have used it with more purposeful intent than others, the only exception being that of S. Kapur Singh, M.P., who, in a few short poems, has touched heights in satirical writing about which it is not easy to forego the use of superlatives.

To sum up, it is clear that, by and large, contemporary Panjabi humour is related to contemporary life. Most of our laughter is directed against anti-social behaviour. Our humorists mean rather "serious" business because their art rips open the masks of poseurs, normalises human actions, puts incongruities to ridicule, relieves tension and provides new dimensions to commonplace things and situations. It is so rooted in our social milieu that its very crudity and robustness is nothing but a projection of the quality of our life.

Roads, electricity, education, political consciousness and various modern amenities are fast penetrating the farthest corners of the Panjab. These have resulted in throwing up rural humorists, whose passion for rustic analogies, correspondences, contradictions and paradoxes is immense. We can foresee humour in Panjabi literature becoming mellower, rising above the purely personal level and adding a little more of heart to sheer intellect. Better exploitation of language to produce finer nuances is likely to produce humour of a more refined type.

I am sure, before long, it will be possible for me to report to another similar conference of the distinguished writers of all the great Indian languages that the Panjabi people are now trained enough in humour to receive a sudden blow of your stick on his nose without your facing the prospect of any serious consequences!

# HUMOUR

## MODERN SANSKRIT

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By Dr. V. RAGHAVAN

**I**T is one of the general criticisms against Sanskrit literature that it is deficient in respect of humour, and that what is worse, in some of the specimens available, *e.g.*, the farces, it is some coarse form of humour that is offered to us. This is strange because in theory, there is adequate recognition of humour as a *rasa*, and provision is made for it in some classes of literature. There is a modern Sanskrit literature and currently many writers for whom the natural and most efficient medium of expression is Sanskrit. Upon this the speaker does not want to linger and shall only draw your attention to his long survey of Sanskrit in the volume of Contemporary Literature in Indian languages published by the Sahitya Akademi, and to the new Sanskrit literary journal, the *Samskrita Pratibhā*, being brought out by him on behalf of the Sahitya Akademi, as also to the Sanskrit journals some of which have survived over a long period. These have published a considerable amount of Sanskrit writing by modern writers which supply us with material for the study of the present subject.

To begin with: One major factor should be mentioned, which, as in the case of other Indian languages, acted as a powerful and stimulating influence on Sanskrit,—the contact with the West and with English literature. In fact, it is the study of Sanskrit on which this influence was first brought to bear. New forms, new modes and new trends and tastes were imbibed by Sanskritists who read Western literature, and although the minor poem, the short story and humour were known well to ancient Sanskrit literature, it may be said that in all these lines, the new impetus to creative activity that arose in Sanskrit was a direct result of modern education and acquaintance with European literature.

Two of the works in Sanskrit most frequently imitated, down the centuries, are the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Meghaduta* of Kālidāsa. In modern times too imitations of these two classics were produced, in a serious and sublime vein; also these

two forms, the *Gītā* and *Dūta*, their framework and style, were used by modern writers in a lighter mood. It is a well-known device in humour and satire to ridicule a thing by using a sublime association for a low subject. C. R. Sahasrabuddhe's *Kāka-dūta*, published from Dharwar in 1917, employs the crow as the messenger and, employing the same messenger, Prof. M. R. Rajagopala Iyengar makes a thief send a message from his *gaol*; from the same place, the same character sends a dog to his beloved in K. V. Krishnamurti Sastry's *Sunakadūta*. The same Sahasrabuddhe adopted the *Gītā*-form to express his enjoyment of Tea in his *Chāha-gītā*. Similarly, the Surat Congress is the subject of a parody in what is called the *Congress Gītā*, published from Madras in 1908. The palate of the orthodox, to whose class the bulk of the Sanskritists of the early transitional stage belonged, was getting slowly accustomed to certain modern delicacies, and some poems show their sly yearning for coffee, tea and more than these the onion. Examples of these poems are the *Palānduprārthana* of Muḍḍu Viṭṭhalacarya and the century of verses on the onion, *Palāndusataka* by Krishna Sarma of Jaipur: the *Kāphīsodasikā* of Atreya (V. Swaminatha Sarma), the *Kāpī-pānīya* of M. V. Sampat Kumar Acharya, and Karikkad M. Krishnan Namputirippad's verses on a Cup of Tea.

The present writer has an unpublished poem on Tobacco and its trilogy of forms,—the smoked, the chewed and the dust that is stuffed into the nostrils—, called the *Brahmapatra-vaivarta-purāna*.

There have been short and long poems on the broomstick and its greatness, on the bug and the mosquito. The fickle nature of some who begin to observe austerities and slowly offer excuses to themselves for relaxing from the vow little by little and finally end up again in indulgence as before is brought out effectively in a poem called *Kapīnām upavāsah*, the monkeys' fast, by Pt. D. T. Tatacharya. Modern party meetings and conferences and the slogans shouted by different people are made fun of by the wellknown Kerala Pandit Punnasserī Nilakantha Sarma in his *Sāttvikasvapna*, published from Trichur (Kollam 1097).

Several humorous folk-tales have been retold in Sanskrit prose and also humorous imaginative stories told in folk-tale style. Y. Mahalinga Sastri, for instance, has a large collection of this type, two samples of which, *Sākalyasya svabhāvoktiḥ* and *Aśvapālasya kathā*, he has given in the *Samskrita Pratibha*, I.ii and II.ii. Gaṇapati Sukla Vatsyayan has *Loka-kathā* of this



class in *Sanskrita Pratibhā*, III.ii, entitled *Samāsokti Camatkrti*. Short humorous anecdotes and tit-bits under the titles *Hāsyā-lapah* or *Hasata* or *Hasantu tarām* or *Parihasa Svabhāvo* me are to be found as regular features in Sanskrit periodicals.

Rarely have Sanskrit writers tried the Essay or Skit in humorous style. An exception to this is a recent writer from Poona, Asoka Akalinjkar some of whose manuscripts have been with the *Sanskrita Pratibhā*, and one of which entitled *Tato jayam udirayet* has been published. This writer has a definite, marked style of his own and a flair for humorous analogies and allusions. His writings appear regularly in the Sanskrit magazine *Sarada* (Poona) with which he is editorially connected.

It is in the short drama and the farce that humorous writing has been more prominently cultivated by modern Sanskrit writers. *Vanik-sutā* (Merchant's Daughter) by Surendramohan Panchatirtha presents a rich young widow being wooed by a Hindu and a Buddhist, the former eventually succeeding. *Snusāvijaya* (the Triumph of the Daughter-in-law) by Sundara-rāja Kavi (1841-1904) is a fine example of a modern farce which depicts the common domestic happenings with all their realism and humour; in this play, which this writer has edited and also produced on the stage, the unreasonable mother-in-law, along with her daughter, is teasing her daughter-in-law, and her obedient son is unable to help the situation; the good father, fed up with his wife and daughter, solves the problem by settling some property on the latter, and makes them live separately. Though here and there a few undignified abusive terms, quite common in our homes, are used, the idea on the whole is very well worked out and the style is simple and lively. The appearance of the *Snusāvijaya* produced quite a stir among Pandits and I understand that a reply to it also appeared in Tamilnad in the one-act play entitled the Triumph of the Mother-in-law (*Svasrū-vijaya*) but it has not yet been possible to trace a copy of this.

In the pages of the *Sanskrita Sahitya Parishad Patrika* and the *Manjusha* of Calcutta, several short and one-act plays of a humorous nature have appeared. *Kāncanamala* of Surendramohana shows where love of ornaments could lead one. Srijiya Nyayatirtha, now Principal, Sanskrit College, Bhatpara, West Bengal, has persevered in this line: In his *Ksuta-ksema*, a miser and black-marketeer outwits Citragupta too in the other world and succeeds in getting from Yama a fresh lease of life. In his *Rāgavirāga* in the *Sanskrita Pratibha* I.i, he presents a King

who hates music, but who is eventually made to realise the value of that art by seeing for himself how it saved his own Prince from a parricidal intention. One of his latest playlets in the *Sanskṛita Pratibhā* is a farce called *Vivāhavidambanam* in which an old man who wishes to marry and a professional marriage-broker are featured.

S. S. Khot of Nagpur wrote some short farces like *Mālābhaviṣyam* and *Lālāvaidyam*, the former using the machinery of astrology and the latter on a quack doctor, all of which have been published and also tried on the stage in Nagpur. K. L. Vyasaraṇya Sastry of Madras has among his varied writings, three farces, *Līlāvīlāsa*, *Camunda* and *Nipunika*; the first one deals with the plight of a girl whom the father and mother want to give in marriage to two different boys, but whom her brother succeeds in marrying to a classfellow of his. The second deals with a young widow, a London-returned medical practitioner, who settles down in a village and after a good deal of opposition from and difficulty with the orthodox folk, succeeds in winning over their hearts. Y. Mahalinga Sastry has three farces, the *Kaundinya Prahasana*, the *Ubhayarūpaka* and the *Srināraṇarādīya*; in the first, he takes up an old proverbial motif of a miser and how a persevering youngster who has vowed to eat at others' houses outwits him; in the second, the central idea is the old orthodox traditional family and the new-fangled English educated son, his ambition to go abroad and desire to have his own love-marriage; a number of incidents are cleverly worked in with a comedy of errors turning on the piece of paper having the famous line in Hamlet which the boy is to play in his College misleading the parents to suspect that their son is going to commit suicide; although long, with its characters bearing abstract names, the *Ubhayarūpaka* is a very interesting production. His *Kaliprādurbbhāva*, which handles an old story may also be mentioned for its humorous element. But perhaps special mention is due of his *Sringāraṇarādīya*, a striking piece in this class of farces; here the author takes the grand old Brahmacārin of the Purāṇas, Narada, who brings about so many marriages, and who according to a story in the *Devibhāgavata* is transformed into a woman and is made to enjoy married life; the fertile motif of sex-transformation is employed by the author here with originality and effectiveness.

In his *Purusarāmaṇīya*, Srijiva Nyayatirtha, already mentioned, has used the same motif, but by artificially dressing up a male character as a female; however, the pure human contri-

vance and comedy of disguise gets diluted in the end by the introduction of a divine element in the person of Siva. The present writer has tried to parody later decadent Sanskrit poetry revelling in hyperboles through a farce which actualises some of the conceits and exaggerations of imagination and works out their calamitous consequences; this, entitled *Pratāparudrīyavidambana*, as well as his *Vimukti*, an allegorical farce with a philosophical meaning running all through, remain unpublished. As an example of Sanskrit translations and adaptations of farces from the West may be mentioned *Vaidyabandhu* by V. S. Venkataraghavachari, an adaptation of Moliere's *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*, which the present writer has produced for the Radio. A. R. Ratnaparakhi is noted for his ability to handle Sanskrit freely for expressing modern ideas, situations and things, although while doing so he coins a number of his own new Sanskrit equivalents for modern things, gadgets, etc. His style is enlivened by a sense of humour as can be seen in his series of thirteen imaginative dialogues called *Samvāda-mālā*.

For a language whose study and cultivation are faced with difficulties all round, it is no small credit that creative activity in it—which is the life-spark of a language—has been kept alive and is steadily growing by putting forth new forms and by breaking new ground in its hoary history. Humour in many ways may be considered to be a touchstone of a language having a vitality and living expression. Sanskrit has shown that in this respect, its pulse has been beating steadily. Several official and voluntary efforts are today being put forth to foster its development and helping fresh creative activity in it. The Indian P.E.N. and the National Sahitya Akademi have been a source of great encouragement to this creative work in Sanskrit today.



# HUMOUR

## MODERN SINDHI

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By RAM PANJWANI

**H**UMOUR IN Sindhi literature is a comparatively modern phenomenon. Our older poets were mystics who explored the realm of the spirit in their search for the ultimate truth. The triumvirate of Sindhi poetry—Shah, Sami and Sachal—were frankly didactic in their purpose. Their poetry surprises us with its fine excess, with the beauty of its expression. We are always made aware of the fact that it is primarily concerned with the intangibles, with God and immortality and things that mirror forth the spirit's face. It touches depths in us we never suspected before; communicates the incommunicable; and establishes a bridge between us and that which lies beyond the veil. It is great poetry which gives us intimations of the Infinite in the midst of the finite, but there is very little humour in it. Yet there are occasions when each of these three great poets gives us an indication of the lighter side of his nature. Shah unbends and smiles kindly only when he is talking to Wagand, who feels sick when the conversation turns upon God and the soul, but who is all too anxious to forget that he is sick when he is offered a free meal.

*Jisma Men Jado Khain te Khura Hane*

Sachal relaxes from his usual gravity when he writes of the Mullas, who never practise what they preach, who claim that prayer is food enough for them and that the acceptance of a free meal is an act of sacrifice on their part, for their acceptance of food arises out of their desire to bring peace to the restless unquiet dead.

*Mulla Ta Karan Maniyen*

*Khatma Diyan Tha Khasa*

*Mulla Chavan Tha Keen Khinyun Tha*

*Khai Vanjan Tha Kasa.*

Similarly, Sami, the great Vedanti poet, lashes out at those pseudo-saints and priests who, motivated by self-interest, mis-

guide people and make them believe that a dip in the Ganges will absolve them of all their sins.

The writers who came after these three poets wrote in a more or less similar strain, seriously, soberly, mystically. Even in their humour, when they wrote humorously, there is an element of seriousness, as is evident in the following lines of Sanghi:

*Dibo Ko Doh Hin Halat Men Yaro Nawjwanan Khe  
Mithe Mahun Mahlaka Je Khe Disce Khud Peersan Bigrya*

I am an old man who has lost his heart to the beloved.

How can I, then, find fault with the young for something of which we old men are equally guilty?

With the coming of Bewas, however, humour comes into its own. Sometimes it is kindly, sometimes it takes the shape of mild sarcasm or biting satire; but always it is used as an instrument of social reform. The poems of Bewas are sober and serious. It is in his plays—for the stage was very popular in Sind at that time—that he indulges the lighter side of his nature, and gives us heart-warming humour. These plays of his are written in the tradition of Urdu and Gujarati plays, and the techniques he uses had already been made familiar by Agha Hashar and others. Two of Bewas's plays—*Podhe jo Parno* (The Wedding of an Old Man) and *Agambar-Digambar* need particular mention here. In the first, Bewas distils a great deal of fun out of the desire of an old man to marry a girl who is young enough to be his grand-daughter, and, at the same time, lashes out at those who tolerate and even encourage such May-December marriages. In the second, he deals with two unemployed youths who hit upon a novel way of earning their living. They don saffron robes, mouth a few Sanskrit *shlokas*, and are always accompanied by a couple of disciples who are, in point of fact, their partners in the fraud they perpetrate on gullible people. And they make a lot of money; for where there are suckers, the scoundrels, though garbed in sanctity, will always make a pretty penny.

These plays, together with those that Bewas wrote on child marriage and on the dowry system, roused the social conscience of the people even while they rocked them with laughter, and paved the way for much needed social reforms in these directions.

Hyder, a great revolutionary in ideas and in literature, also aims at correcting social foibles through satirical portraiture, of people who, full of faults themselves, are always eager to correct them in others. His *Two Stammerers* is a fine example

of this kind of writing, and its central theme may be summed up in the following lines of Zaffar, the great Moghul poet:

*Na Thi Hala Ki Jab Hamen Apni Khabar  
Rahe Dekhate Aurun Ke Aibo Hunar  
Pari Apni Burayun Par Jo Nazar  
To Nigah Men Koi Bura Na Raha*

We turn a blind eye on our own faults  
And yet direct the Searchlight of our  
Reason on similar faults in others.  
But when our own shortcomings are brought  
Home to us, we at once take up the stand  
That others are as faultless as we are.

The *Two Stammerers* of Hyder inspired me to write a play of my own with the same title, but with a different purpose. There is, in my play, a blacksmith and his well-to-do neighbour. The blacksmith heats up a bar of iron at a time when his assistant is away. He and his neighbour then fall to discussing how and why and for what purpose the red-hot bar of iron should be hammered, and what shape it should be given, till the bar itself gets cold. The blacksmith looks up and stammers out some comments on the futility of a discussion which ignores the real issues of the moment. The play thus spotlights the wrangles of the Great Powers over issues of prestige and of *izzat* while the real issue—the peace of the world—which they had met to discuss, is forgotten. And this is done in a manner which brings home to us the fact that laughter often lurks behind tragedy, that life-bearing rain often comes close on the heels of the terrifying lightning and thunder that rocks the world.

*Bijli Men Hai Poshida Toofan Kayamat Ka  
Hansna Bhi To Duniya Me Rone Ka Bahana Hai*

Bewas also inspired me to write another play, *May No Daughters be Born*, (Dheear no jamen) which is a satire on the dowry system that is eating into the very vitals of our society. In this play, however, it is not the boy's father who demands a dowry, but the girl's. He says, in effect, that he loves his daughter; that he has spent a great deal of money on educating and bringing her up; that if she gets married and leaves him to live with her husband, he will be unhappy, and if he pays a dowry as well, he will be doubly unhappy; that, therefore, he ought to be compensated for the loss of his daughter and for



the money he has spent on her education and upbringing. And then he adds: "What is the quantum of compensation you will offer if I agree to have my daughter married to your son? If you cannot have something you want from a shopkeeper without paying for it, why should you have my daughter from me unless you are willing to compensate me for my loss of her?"

This brings home to the boy's father the folly and the unreasonableness of his demand for dowry and leaves him in a chastened mood. The comedy in the play, of course, arises out of the topsy-turvydom of ideas and accepted modes of behaviour. Life is seen and described through the wrong end of the telescope, so that reality and sanity may prevail.

The pedantic ways and imitative behaviour and dress of our young men, infected by the superficials of the American way of life, have also come in for humorous and satirical portraiture at the hands of our writers. These young men now say "yep" instead of "yes", "nope" instead of "no" and "Hi" when they greet one another. They frequent restaurants and cinemas, live what they fancy is a fashionable and "fast" life, and generally move about in a manner which calls attention to them. As a result, our values of life have gone by the board. Frivolity, sham and ostentation have taken the place of sobriety and sanity. Gobind Malhi in his *Nimmi* raises much laughter by his caricature of such young persons.

Love itself has become something cheap and tawdry, for young people fancy themselves as lovers and model their behaviour on their counterparts in films imported from Hollywood. These modern lovers of ours, these modern Majnus have been analysed in Lekraj's *Mr. Majnu*—an enjoyable satirical comedy which pinpoints the folly of imitative behaviour, of trying to graft on to our way of life customs and manners and modes of behaviour which cannot harmonise with our own.

Mangharam Malkani, one of our most charming modern dramatists, has, on the other hand, satirised, with a great deal of verve and humour, the foibles of those girls who insist on living beyond the income of their parents and husbands for no better reason than to outshine others and to be one up on their friends and neighbours. Their follies evoke laughter from us, and bring home to us, in a most enjoyable way, the stupidities and artificialities of behaviour arising out of a desire to seem better off than we actually are. This kind of writing has been followed by many another dramatist.

In the works of the writers so far considered, humour has

been used as an instrument of social reform. J. N. Nagrani, however, has blazed a new trail in that his plays are primarily motivated by a desire to provoke laughter, to entertain for the sake of entertaining. Critics sometimes read more into them than Nagrani himself intended. They read a social purpose in his *Gamtu* series of plays when, in point of fact, Nagrani is primarily concerned with providing fun and entertainment. A barrister, a doctor, a political leader, an editor—these have become in his works, not the benefactors of the people but frauds upon society. The doctor, instead of relieving suffering, prolongs illness so that he may make more money. The editor, who should be a votary of truth and whose primary business should be the presentation of objective views and news, becomes a purveyor of sensation and scandal. The political leader leads his followers up the garden path, while the barrister exercises all his ingenuity and talent to procure the acquittal of the guilty. Nagrani thus distils laughter out of abnormal characters, funny situations, conceits of language and references to topical happenings. He gives everything a humorous or satirical twist, not because he wishes to reform society, but because he desires to entertain and to amuse. This is evident from his portrayal of the doctor who treats blood pressure by prescribing a mixture of refugee tincture (5 grains), panchsheela tincture (5 grains), syrup Unesco (8 grains) and enough aqua integration to make up a mixture of 8 ozs.

The sense of frustration and insecurity which came in the wake of partition gave a new orientation to Sindhi literature. But while some became cynical and hard, Zia laughed at difficulties. He makes them appear trifles. Quite often he makes of them stepping stones to worthwhile things. He was deeply moved by the indifference of the *mukhis*, the *chaudharies* and the officials to the sufferings of displaced persons, and he has given expression to this, not in a mood of violence or of bitterness, but in a manner which holds up to ridicule these so-called leaders and benefactors of our people. He has made a laughing-stock of them under the pseudonyms of "The Sepoy" and "The Cigarette Smoker," and has distilled out of their behaviour a kind of humour that is something new in our literature. His *Curses of Pohu's Mother*, which depicts the life and conditions of displaced persons in a camp, is a fine example of this kind of humour, which trembles on the verge of tears.

But though Zia's humour is without bitterness, his death in poverty has left a sour taste in the mouth of many a writer. In

his *Shair jo Janazo*—(The Death of a Poet), for example, Tirath Basant lashes out at the insensibility of those who pay handsome tributes to an artist after his death and talk of raising a memorial to his greatness, but who lifted not a finger to help him when he was alive and lived in poverty. In *Kuta Shala*—(The Dog-House), he lampoons those who show greater concern for the street dogs and curs than for human beings struggling against poverty, and degradation. Even children who are admittedly the cherished possession of any nation and the builders of its future, hardly excite any sympathy and compassion. This play satirises the absurd manner in which charity is dispensed in our country and the insensibility of the rich. Basant's humour is bitter; it is intellectual because he is an intellectual who feels deeply enough to turn the searchlight of ridicule on the shams and hypocrisies of life.

Most of the post-partition writers give humour a new content by invading the realm of the spirit in an irreverent and light-hearted manner. Their humour arises out of the juxtaposition of ideas which are startlingly opposed to one another. Their questing, rational, sceptical mind spotlights the stark realities of starvation rather than the attitudes that develop following promises of some glorious future. Their humour, however, moves us to a smile rather than to an unrestrained chuckle of laughter, and is kindly rather than bitter. It suggests the solution of the problems that needs must be faced, if poverty and hunger are to become things of the past. For example, the young poet Shaad says:

*We shall have the fruit of our labour, not in this life  
But in the Next. This may be so;  
But if I have no faith in the life to come,  
What should I do?*

*It's treason, we are told, to revolt against our own Government;  
But when I am starving and the future is unrelentingly harsh,  
What should I do?*

His need of the immediate, of the necessity of surviving here and now, is more urgent than his need (always questionable) of the advantages of the Hereafter. For him, *Bhojan* takes precedence over *Bhajan*. This does not mean that our writers ignore the fact that man is often moved by urges that are deeper and more vital than the merely physical needs. The desire to reach out to the moon and the stars, to reach out to the Ineffable beyond the veil, to capture the song of the sea—this moves him



to ecstasy. Nevertheless, he has his feet firmly planted on the ground. He knows, even while he soars on ethereal wings, that the grocer's bill has to be settled, and this gives an edge of urgency and immediacy to his thoughts and feelings. He falls to earth, and grapples with things of the earth—with the problem of poverty and starvation, and with the corruption that infects our life.

The younger generation, however sceptical it may be, is hostile to any suggestion of vulgarity. There was a trend in this direction, and our humour did occasionally become somewhat vulgar. The younger writers have resisted and the older writers frowned on this trend so successfully that vulgarity in humour has already become a thing of the past in our literature.

From the foregoing, it will be obvious that the modern writer, like the modern youth, is a calculating man—calculating even when he is in love, though love is said to be blind. "My beloved", the poet says, "is coming to my house to-day. My heart bubbles with joy; it overflows in the ecstasy of anticipation. But when I think that she will find only a broken-down little cot in my cottage, I feel depressed and sad." This is how he treats love—with his heart in the clouds but his feet firmly planted on earth.

The younger generation of writers to which belong Sundri, Uttam, Kala, Moti, Popati, Sugan, Rahi, Kirat Babani, Anand Golani, Mohan Kalpana, Gobind Punjabi and others, realises the importance of humour in literature as well as in life. It knows that laughter and tears dwell together in the heart of man; that the tragedies of life would be intolerable if we turned a blind eye on the comedies of existence. The younger writer's awareness of this is evident in the fact that for the first time in Sindhi literature, an issue of a literary magazine, *Nai Duniya*, devoted entirely to humour, has been brought out; for he knows, as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel knew, that "one gale of laughter is better than a hundred groans; that while work is undoubtedly worship, laughter is life." Without laughter what would be there to live for when the heart is torn with agony?

# HUMOUR

## MODERN TAMIL

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By KA NAA SUBRAMANYAM

TAMIL literature is rich in a classical poetic tradition of epic, lyric, devotional and didactic poetry, but it can be said to lack a heritage of humour. We shall ransack the old poetry of the Tamils in vain for rich, or even poor, veins of humour. A heritage of self-assertion, inspired in a large measure by a sense of inferiority, is hardly conducive to a humorous attitude to life and letters; if anything, the old Tamils can be said to have taken themselves only too seriously as we modern Tamils also tend to do. What little of humour there was, was inspired by a sense of the most ludicrous or the most vulgar. After the commentators, and in the middle period, in Tamil literature, the vilest of puns pass for humour; this tendency to use puns was helped by an inchoate vocabulary where often a word can be twisted to give as many as fifty or sixty different meanings in the same context in a few extreme cases and to as many as three or four meanings ordinarily.

The middle period, that is the years after the epic poet *Kamban* who can be claimed to have lived in the eleventh or the twelfth century, abounded in a number of minor poets who had perhaps a little more of the sense of humour than their predecessors. *Kalamegham* for instance was a master of the pun, and could on occasion rise to great heights of humour by simply making his spiritual contemporaries ridiculous or gross; his occasional lyrics make a mock of professionals whether they were Gods and Goddesses or prostitutes and prosperous traders. Many of the lesser poets, with a gift for the *double entendre* and famished with hunger, sang of the hard lot of poets like themselves in more or less bitter but humorous terms. In the meanwhile a healthy folk tradition of humour was also growing up, as we can see in the temple plays called *Kuravanchis*, in the harvest plays like *Pallus* and in various other attempts at folk drama like the *Nondi Natakam* and others. Ballads too took shape; they are satirical in intent and scope, sometimes making fun of the social evils and the religious bigotry of the people.

The East India Company and its ways, later the coming of the railway and the rice mills, the acute famines and the indifference of the government to the sufferings of the people, came to be rhymed in quite effective humorous and satirical terms. Some of these ballads gained such currency with the people that the Government banned them.

The modern period in Tamil can be said to have started with the first piece of consistent prose in the language, the *Tales of the Paramartha Guru*, by Consantius Beschi, a Jesuit missionary who came to India in the closing years of the seventeenth century, went native to win souls for Christ and wrote epics and minor poems in Tamil. He satirised the ways of the native Indian Gurus of those days in his tales which were written some time in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The inspiration behind these tales was many a native folk tale which the author adapted to his purpose; not a few of the stories remind us of the popular tales of Europe current in the days of the Jesuits. But whatever their origin, these tales have entered the lives of the people of the south, and not only of the Tamils. The tale of the disciple who tested the river, whether it was asleep or awake, by thrusting a burning faggot into it, and that of the other disciple who tried to lop off a branch of a tree squatting on the branch and when told by a passer-by that he would fall and when it did happen took the passer-by for a great astrologer, and such like tales have entered the life of the people even though the pundits and the academicians have been chary of mentioning this masterpiece in prose while they have been unduly appreciative of the epics and the poems of the author albeit they are of middling quality. The bite in the satire of Beschi has become blunted with time but the clean and human fun in the tales is still fresh; it can be considered the first humorous masterpiece in the Tamil language, though it is not by a Tamil.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were formative periods in modern Tamil literature. During the first half of the 19th century appeared the musical opera of Gopalakrishna Bharathiar in whose songs there is a thin vein of humour, especially in contrasting the lack of spiritual insight in a high caste Hindu, the Brahmin, who employs the really spiritual Harijan, Nandan. It is a tale that is in tone well in advance of its generation, and modern in a very surprising and unexpected manner.

In the novel of Vedanayakam Pillai, the first novel in Tamil



written in 1869 and in a few of his distinctive songs and lyrics, the Tamil reader finds for the first time a consistent sense and use of humour. The author in his *Prathapa Mudaliar Charithram* brings together a number of humorous episodes and incidents; in fact almost all the jokes that were current in his day find expression in the novel. But some of the novelist's chief characters are mere burlesques.

Rajam Iyer who wrote the second novel in the language in the 'Nineties had also the gift of humour and he uses it to good purpose in his one novel, *Kamalambal Charithram*. His humorous creations, the immortal teacher of Tamil, and his gossipy widow of the village, are wholly lovable characters and are dearly beloved of the Tamils. The author has deep sympathy and insight and in caricaturing them he does not forget that they are human beings. Rajam Iyer gave a new dimension to fictional characterisation, pinning his faith in the piling up of realistic detail. Unlike the earlier novelist, Rajam Iyer works his humour into the very texture of his novel, not being satisfied with a string of humorous episodes and anecdotes to entertain the reader. His sense of humour is subtle and never boisterous. He died very young before his genius for comedy or for vedanta could ripen into fulness in his works of art; barring this novel, a few chapters of a novel in English and some pieces collected under the general title *Rambles in Vedanta*, Rajam Iyer left no other work behind him.

Other novelists who succeeded Vedanayakam Pillai and Rajam Iyer were not men of genius like them (with the possible exception of Madhaviah whose contribution to humour is negligible indeed; he was too ardent a social reformer and he took his art much too seriously.) The lesser breed of Tamil novelists made many a humorous writer of the second-rate or third-rate variety in English available to the Tamil reader; Mrs. Caudle's *Curtain Lectures*, Charles Dickens and some of the Handy Andy episodes among others found their way into the Tamil language. In the pre-*Kalki* era, that is before the thirties of the present century, Vaduvor Duraiswamy Iyengar who can be singled out as a prolific and influential writer had a grain of humour in his works (mostly unacknowledged adaptations) though he had no single book of humour to his credit.

The stage had in the course of a hundred years of growth begun to have a slant towards humour. But no great original work was done, except by way of interpretation or adaptation. In ballad-making too there were a few considerable but generally

anonymous figures, but these ballads tended to fall into traditional patterns and contributed nothing original. Of the non-fictionists, Subramania Bharathi, the national poet of the Tamils of the twentieth century, had a quick sense of humour as can be evidenced by many of his lyrics, by his prose tales which hark back to the broad folkforms of the comic, and by his *Kuyil*, the long parable-like poem on the nightingale, which has a few humorous insights and descriptions.

We reach the contemporary period with the thirties—the Gandhian awakening and the periodical press between them begin to shape the writing of the Tamils as they did the writing of the other languages in India. *Kalki*, along with his band of entertainers, ransacked contemporary English magazines like *Punch*, *London Opinion*, *The Humorist* and others as well as the accepted humorous masterpieces of the West in search of material that they could “Tamilise” and give to their enlarging circle of readers. Some of the most celebrated works of Mark Twain, Stephen Leacock, Barry Pain, Stacy Aumonier, W. W. Jacobs, Leonard Merrick, Richmal Compton and P. G. Wodehouse contributed substantially and without any profit to themselves to the entertainment of the Tamils. *Kalki*, Devan and a band of writers got quite a reputation as humorists on the strength of borrowed feathers. Towards the middle of the forties, *Kalki* suddenly deserted his role of humorist and set up as a historical novelist, making the glorious past of the Tamils alive in more or less truthful fictional recreations; as a historical fictionist perhaps *Kalki*’s work can compare with the work of Lord Lytton and Dumas, often even deriving from them.

As a humorist of great merit, in the contemporary period, the late SVV should be mentioned. A few of his earlier pieces in Tamil (he had even in the later twenties distinguished himself as a writer of original humorous pieces in the English language) were frankly adaptations from the great American and English humorists, but later he found his feet and exploited a rich vein of shrewd observation and deep insight in a series of pieces mostly serialised week after week in the pages of *Ananda Viketan*. If any one in Tamil literature deserves the name of humorist, it is SVV and none other. His observation was quite shrewd; his sympathy with the old ways in contrast to the unavoidably new was genuine; his insight was profound. He distilled in his rather formless tales and novels the very essence of humour. At his brightest he can be seen in his sketches of modern city life; his happy family was a

lovable family of individuals who are very well portrayed. In his contrasting characters from two different generations he achieved a high level of unconscious art; his strength was that he could insist on the humorous as well as on the human side of a picture at the same time. Presenting contemporary manners, he can be mildly ironical; he does not attempt satire. It is a sad commentary on the state of Tamil letters and the Tamil lack of humour that almost all the books of SVV have not been available to the younger generations.

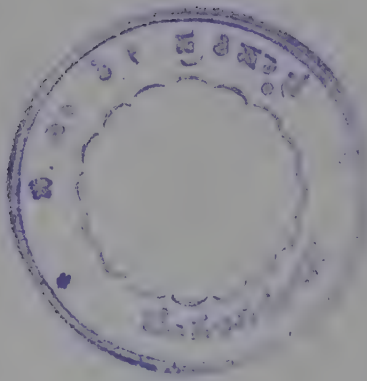
In reconstructing some of the scenes of the past from a personal angle, that great scholar the late Dr. Swaminatha Iyer was often humorous with a touch of gentle irony. Among the younger and serious writers of the short story, the novel, the play, the poem and the like, there was some humour occasionally but it was not always consistent. One humorist of the serious group in his parodies in prose and verse and in his essays and skits gave promise of originality but he did not pursue it to the end; he is *Sundararajan* whose pen-name was Chitty Pudumai-ppittan could occasionally express his general sense of frustration and bitterness in humorous terms; one of his pieces, *Naveena Kuchela* is a masterpiece of humour of this sort. In many stories of his we see a mordant and morbid humour that does not delight as much as nauseate us. The late Desika Vinayakam Pillai wrote a whole poem, a lampoon in verse on the matriarchal system of society current recently in his region. S. D. S. Yogiari another poet of the modern period, castigated the city and its ways in a mildly sarcastic manner in a longish poem. Kothamangalam Subbu a ballad singer of some merit could be humorous on occasions with a raciness that is of the soil and belongs to the villager. The stage had its own variety of humour, often on the most elementary level; some of the attempts at humour on the stage as well as over the radio are pathetic and pitiable; most of it is second-hand. Humorists of the current period who have a distinguishing point of view are, to mention only a few, Bharathan, V. C. Gopalaratnam, Makaram, Gomathi Swaminathan, Nadodi and Thumilan.

The great Tamil humorist, if we except SVV, is yet to be born. The peculiarity of what might be Tamil humour at its best is its broadness, its tendency to be coarse and wordy. Along with SVV's work should be mentioned the work of N. S. Krishnan in which he was aided, if we are to believe rumours, by the poet Udumalai Narayana Kavi; it is the parody of Nandan, the *Kinadanar Charithram*. Like the old Harijan saint



who was fired by the zeal of seeing Shiva dancing at Chidambaram, this modern boy is fired with the ideal of achieving education in an English school in the city and the many difficulties that beset his path are narrated in song and music in the mock-opera *Kindan* which rises to Gilbert and Sullivan heights in many places. This to my mind is the typical example of Tamil humour—half serious, half humorous, completely irresponsible but human.

Any new development in humour has to take note of and derive from this meagre tradition and give it personal and individual turns as both SVV and N. S. Krishnan were able to give it. The future, one feels, is full of promise. The present situation in humour is not completely bleak; this in spite of rather than because of the mass-circulation weeklies of a professedly humorous nature which set out to entertain hundreds of thousands of Tamil readers. Except in a few instances of a rare kind, these periodicals are scarcely original and only very occasionally intelligent or intellectual. The past in humour, except for a few stray instances in Tamil, has been more or less a desert. The future holds all the more promise.



# HUMOUR

## MODERN TELEGU

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By POTHUKUCHI SAMBASIVARAO

“**T**O DEFINE humour, perhaps, were as difficult as to define wit; for, like that, it is of infinite variety. To enumerate the several humours of men, were a work as endless as to sum up their several opinions; since there are many things who are yet quite different in humours. But though we cannot certainly tell what wit is, or what humour is, yet we may go near to show something which is not wit or not humour and yet often mistaken for both. When a poet brings a character on the stage, committing a thousand absurdities, and talking impertinencies, roaring aloud, and laughing immoderately on every, or rather upon no occasion, this is a character of humour,” observed William Congreve, famous Stuart Dramatist, in a letter to John Dennis, an eminent critic of his day. Further, he continued, “there is more of humour in our English comic writers than in any others. I do not at all wonder at it for I look upon humour to be almost of English growth; at least it does not seem to have found such increase on any other soil; and what appears to me to be the reason of it is the great freedom, privilege, and liberty which the common people of England enjoy.” Though the whole of the latter part of his statement is not acceptable to many of us Indian writers, since we have our own claims, it is indisputable that humour is produced in enjoying conditions of freedom, privilege and liberty.

Sri Kandukuri Veeresalingam, the father of Modern Telugu literature, as he is rightly called, is a product of such conditions, and with him, the modern age in Telegu begins. As social reformer, he organised, as writer, he infused a spirit of new life, and as a humorist, he amused serious thinkers devoted to reform and literature, with humour, in Andhra. His *Prahasanas* written in an easy and elegant style provoked such humour through characters like those Congreve described. When literature was controlled by traditions and conventions, these barriers were crossed over and a new phase of life was opened before the enlightened and the common as well, by Kandukuri. He was

the first to sow the seeds of humour in the field of Telugu literature.

Ancient Telugu literature was no less rich in humour, but it could be enjoyed mainly by Pandits and intellectuals. Plays based on mythological plots invariably depicted humorous characters to give relief to the audience at intervals. Nakshtraka in *Harischandra*, Narada in mythology and certain disciples of various kings and *Rishis* in the old fiction, were entertaining enough to ease the strain on the thinking mind. Ancient poets had always to struggle to create humour by creating odd characters. As the Prabandha age began, poets used their scholarship to express humour. Tenali Ramakrishna Kavi belongs to this category. The advancement of civilisation and the consequent complex social structure have of late given scope for the creation of interesting situations, the study of which has been the pursuit of modern humorists in Telugu. Realism, or naturalism, satire or hyperbole, metaphor, symbolism or even cynicism carries with it a peculiar aspect of its own humour in any literature of the present time. This requires the existence of a class in society that can be akin to the intellectual and at the same time near the masses. Andhra now possesses such a class.

Through exposition of social evils to achieve the social purpose of literature, satirical humour has been successfully practiced by writers of many countries. Kandukuri belongs to this class. Widow marriages, rigid orthodoxy, rogues in the guise of gentlemen, and the corruption of scholars were the targets of attack in his humorous writings. To create mere laughter was not the main object of his humour, which is thoughtful in all situations. As his life aimed at a goal, his humour was purposive. The ridicule that emanates from his humour would be so pungent as to annihilate the evil exposed. His *Prahasanas* were more or less long sequences of dialogues in a circumscribed situation. This new feature developed later into the humorous One-Act play in Telugu literature.

*Sakshi*, the volumes of humorous essays by Panuganti Narasimharao, are remarkable in Telugu as humorous literature. One character, Janghala Sastri, exposes his own weak character in his conversation, and through him the society of the day. In bitterness, they are comparable to great humorous literature, such as *Pickwick Papers*.

Western influence gradually spread all over the country during the British regime. Legal practitioners were in demand



in view of increasing rural litigation. Lawyers and doctors trained in the British educational system gained importance. Foreign travel was looked upon with high esteem. Then there arose a grand character in Telegu literature, Barrister Parvateesam. His was a continuous struggle upwards from the orthodox Hindu class to the ranks of modern, civilised and western-influenced aristocratic life. This progress by the character is remarkably humorous. A comparative study of the vast difference of two varied atmospheres and the necessitated adjustment in life by Barrister Parvateesam provokes so much of laughter that ultimately one supports him with sympathy. The creation of Mokkapati Narasimha Sastry, is a farcical character in the eyes of the common reader but the critic finds serious sarcasm suggested in his behaviour that makes one realise the depths of already-existing Indian folk-lore.

Next, Bhamidipati Kameswara Rao ruled the literary field of humour, for nearly fifteen years. His adaptations of Molière were very successful during the days of India's freedom struggle in Andhra. Bhamidipati was the Indianised Molière, whose exaggerations and fantasies worked wonderfully. His humour was very vivid and it encouraged the amateur theatre. Colleges and high schools with untrained talents in acting could do justice to his plays merely on the merit of their content. As a teacher, he taught humour, as a writer he wrote humour, and as a speaker, he was very witty, though his appearance was not humorous. His writing laid down the path for many young writers to follow. Though not so successfully as Bhamidipati, Telugu literature has many other playwrights who attempted humour in their realistic portrayal of themes. Malladi, D. V. Narasaraaju, P. V. Rajamannar, Korlapati and Bhamidipati's son, Radhakrishna, believe in realistic humour. Anything that is odd, obscure or obscene sometimes invokes laughter. In that sense, *Kanyasulkam*, of Gurazada Apparao, though a problem play, has some characters that make us roar with laughter. In it, Gireesam is a typical Andhra character. Mythological plays having become out of date, appear ludicrous in production to the modern audience, though the orthodox still appreciate them in view of their unchanging outlook in the theatre. Individual taste or the opinion of a dying community should not be the watch-word for a final verdict as to the content and manner of humour in literature. Bhamidipati was, of course, hailed as a first class humorist by all classes.

Mullapudi Venkataramana, a young modern fiction writer

has specialised in playing on words to create humour. Highly imaginative thinking coupled with scholarly knowledge is essential before one can embark on a project of this venture. Venkata Ramana has to his credit a number of stories and a few novels that have won him the admiration of the Telugu public. It is yet to be seen how this trend develops and how the people and literary critics receive it in future.

Andhra could find a Wodehouse only in Bhamidipati, in this modern age. He wrote humour and lived for humour. Others were merely passing phases entirely subduing themselves to the restrictions of literary giants but showing a spark of humour as a necessity to make a literary work complete. Such works in modern Telugu literature are many and to enumerate them here is unnecessary.

# HUMOUR

## MODERN URDU

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By A. A. SUROOR

URDU LITERATURE is fairly rich in satire, wit and humour. Before 1857, satire of human foibles and social evils is mixed with playful wit. But there are flashes of humour also, revealing an amused discernment of the ugliness behind the masks of life and the sordidness underneath the serenity. Satire in Sauda has a moral purpose in caricature of certain personalities and a social purpose in caricatures of the age. In Insha, wit is the weapon to succeed at court and to throw back rivals for favour with the nobles, or to win a place in the gathering of poets. But in Nazeer Akbarabadi we reach a new dimension where the poet is neither an angry old man lashing out against men and matters, nor a courtier slaying rivals with his ready wit, but a lover of man in all his paradoxes and pitfalls. In this period inspite of an overhanging cloud of sadness, poets and writers continue to laugh at certain rigid conventions and hurl arrows of deadly wit at preachers and ascetics. They show, inspite of their other-worldliness, a zest for life and a capacity to appreciate the comic side of it.

With Ghalib there is a radical change. With his great intellectual gifts, he is able to perceive how the old order is slowly dying, and is able to put a question mark after every affirmation of belief. He uses humour to create scepticism, and questions old values. He ridicules the idea of an eternal paradise, points slyly to the gap between profession and practice in the preacher, reminds himself that for the sake of dear life, he has to put up with calamities, pokes fun at the romantic attitude towards love, sees beauty as a triumph of the dress-maker's art, questions the why and wherefore of life, argues with God about the wisdom of his creation and brings out in his poetry the cultivated man who has enough imagination to see the ridiculous in the sublime and the sublime in the ridiculous. But it is in his letters that we find his humour at its richest and raciest. He can laugh at his own pretensions, see the well-meaning Englishman making a mess of common Indian



situations, notice the humour that is the bye-product of the tragic happenings of 1857. Ghalib is content to point out the combination of opposites that is man and the odd mixture that is society. He has no desire to change life. His humour enables him to go through it with an equanimity and grace that is the characteristic of a cultivated mind.

Ghalib continued to write letters till his death in 1869, but by that time there was a renaissance in Urdu literature, due to the impact of the West. It was led by men who took life and therefore literature much more seriously and used it as a means for a social, cultural and religious reform. They were earnest men, unwilling to stop by the wayside to enjoy the spectacle of half-asleep men suddenly in a great hurry. All their time and energy was spent in urging them to greater speed. Occasionally, as in Sir Syed and Nazir Ahmad, they showed their contempt for old customs and manners and made fun of their adversaries. But their very eagerness for change, their zeal for reform, their naive wonder at the greatness of the West, provided an opportunity to the easy going, self satisfied and conservative elements to hit back, and make these men in a hurry, look comical. The appearance of *Avadh Punch* in 1877, symbolizes this counter-offensive. The efforts of this journal may, in retrospect, look like those of Don Quixote attacking the wind-mills, but it gave us two outstanding writers, Ratannath Sarshar and Akbar. Sarshar soon detached himself from this movement and accepting the need for social change, gave us unforgettable pictures of the decaying feudal society of Lucknow. His *Fasana-i-Azad* is a loosely-knit novel but it contains brilliant portraits of the easy-going Nawabs, their lazy, opium-eating sycophants, wrapped up in their superstition, their thin pageantry, their vain-glory, and their beautiful Begums with their tragic willowy figures languishing in their harems and yet in a magic world of their own.

It is a dying world but with a charm and grace and even a beauty all its own. Sarshar has been in love with it and he wants to get this love out of his system. He has been able to portray it so brilliantly because he can see beyond his love. It is significant that Khoji, the opium eater who is something of a Falstaff and has a little of Don Quixote in him, a symbol of the age that is in its last flicker, is more lavishly drawn than Azad, the hero who symbolizes the new spirit. Sarshar could be called a satirist, but in essence he is a humorist who uses all the tricks of the trade and quite often has recourse to wit. His propa-

ganda for the new values is poor stuff, but his caricatures of the old values are priceless. Here is true comedy, because the laughter makes us think, and though we move away from the scene, its memory lingers.

Akbar also began with the *Awadh Punch*, but shedding a good deal of its buffoonery, gradually developed into the great wit who has the power of giving sudden intellectual pleasure by "unexpected combining or contrasting of previously unconnected ideas or expressions". We find parody, wit, satire and humour all in abundant measure here, though satire and wit dominate. It is noteworthy that the old order losing ground in the realm of ideas, swept by the tide from the West and a target of the powerful batteries of Sir Syed, Hali and Nazir Ahmad, found a champion in Akbar, who loses the fight, but dominates the field of battle. His satire moves because it has humour in it, his wit is sparkling and even devastating, and forgetting his tirades against Sir Syed, modern education, social reforms, female education and western thought, we enjoy the neatly turned phrase, the 'damning with faint praise and assenting with civil leer' the rich imagination which by an apt allusion here and a choice metaphor there points to the feet of clay in the new god and the chink in the new armour, and particularly, the comic element in the earnestness of the leaders of reform, their occasional naivette and their enthusiasm.

For forty years, Akbar acted like a spiritual siesmograph, recording every shock and making it into poetry of a high order. Johnson said of Swift that "the rogue never hazards a metaphor". Akbar takes every risk, breaks all rules, takes sides, laments the failure of his mission, but does manage to check blind imitation of the west and help in a rediscovery of the East which marches towards progress with a new consciousness of its own heritage. He also sharpens our sensibility by making us aware of the false note in the new harmony which appeared to be perfect to us in the beginning. He has such an "effectiveness of assertion" and such a telling manner that while his outlook is considered out of date, his art remains a great influence.

After Akbar, Zafar Ali Khan, Zarif Lucknavi and Syed Mohammed Jafri have contributed in some measure to our store of humour in poetry, but only Jafri has risen above the witticisms that continued in the tradition of Akbar, and it is to prose that we must now turn for our assessment of the more significant trends. With the rise of journalism, the popularity of the literary magazine, the perfection of the essay as an

art form, and fresh ideas from the West, we have a host of writers who use the inverted or elongated mirror for looking at contemporary life and gleaning some fun from its absurdities.

Sultan Haidar Josh is a satirist who carries on the tradition of Akbar in his novels and short stories. Sajjad Hyder is an essayist, with a touch of romanticism, but he can write in a delightful vein about friends who are bores and about birds who look down on men. Mehfooz Ali who writes the humorous column in Muhamed Ali's *Hamdard* makes fun of British diplomacy and Indian tomfoolery. Mehdi Afadi belongs to the new generation which is part oriental and part occidental and can extract fun out of books and their authors. But in Sajjad Ansari, we have an essayist who is angry with mystics and maulvis and asserts the freedom of literature from the tyranny of morals or zeal for reform and who shows the unmistakable influence of Oscar Wilde, Chesterton and Shaw. His women remind us of the New Woman of Shaw. He handles paradox successfully and attacks the philosophical attitude of Abdul Majid with his lofty airs of high seriousness. The 'tremendous trifles' of Azmatullah Khan are dismissed as much ado about very little. Then comes Hasan Nizami, who has little depth but great range, and is primarily a journalist and a popular wit of the age, but who seems over-rated today.

The period between the two wars sees literature coming into its own, freed from the clutches of politics and religion and this has registered the most notable advances in the period under review. Q. A. Ghaffar, a journalist shaped by the Balkan war, the first World War and the Khilafat and Non-co-operation movement, gave us in *Naqsh-i-Firang* a satirical account of the mission that failed. It is poor reportage but delightful writing. But in *Laila ke Khutut*, he lashes out against men for their cruelty to women, with the savage indignation of Swift. He tries to reform by giving pain. His *Majnoon ki Diary* is a poor defence against the tirades of Laila. Abdul Ghaffar exposed with merciless wit the double standards in our life and the stifling yoke of convention. It is a pity that some of his finest writings in the columns of *Payam* which he edited from Hyderabad have not so far been collected in book form.

Farhatullah Beg like Shaw relies on truth for his humour, but unlike him he is not bitten by the reformer's bug. Lytton Strachey cut the Victorian giants to size. Farhatullah Beg in his portraits of Nazir Ahmad, a memorable Mushaira, and Waheeduddin Salim, used a similar device. He made his heroes



look like human beings, lovable in their eccentricity and massive even in their moments of weakness. Imagination does not run riot here. There is an amazing control, a use of understatement, and hence great effect. Farhatullah Beg shows with consummate skill that the true humorist need not seek funny incidents or word jugglery for his effects. He has only to see the amusing facets of life and to present them in choice, homely idiom.

Then follow Rashid Ahmed Siddiqi, Patras and Falak Paima. Rashid Siddiqi belongs to the school of Akbar in his outlook and to that of Shibli in style. But he uses the paradox with greater felicity than Sajjad Ansari. He has more wit than humour, but both are of a high order. He uses alliteration, metaphor, allusion, and the happy phrase like a flash, to great advantage. His nostalgic pictures of the late M.A.O. College, when the world was green, and his loving portraits of some departed contemporaries who are mostly giants in their new way may not be good history, but they have a life born of artistic vision that disarms criticism. They form a portrait gallery to which we can turn again and again.

Patras is different. He has no axe to grind. He is not bothered either by the past or the future, but extracts the utmost enjoyment out of the present. He has a deceptively simple style which hides great intellectual gifts, a thorough understanding of human nature and an intensive knowledge of world standards. He made parody into an art and used irony to great advantage in the description of the young man who at last realized his ambition to be a boarder, after herculean efforts for many years. He created humour out of the predicament of the student who was a late riser, but wanted to get up early to study for his examination. His *Marhoom Ki Yad men* and *Kuttay* are classics in this line. He does not laugh but smiles in such a delightful manner that life suddenly becomes sunny and pleasant. His disciple Kapoor used parody successfully in *Ghalib Jadid Shoara ki Mehfil Men* and transposed Anarkali to modern times where Faizi is asked to give up translations of Sanskrit classics into Persian and turn to Marx's *Capital*. In a mock serious vein he has focussed our attention on the angularities of our age. It is a pity that Kapoor cannot at times, control his fury at social injustice and political hypocrisy, but where the artist has kept the propagandist in check, delightful skits on contemporary life have emerged.

Falak Paima's appeal is more limited, but he reveals a mind

of a high order. The lashing whip of the satirist and the magic wand of the wit is not for him. His merciless logic is content to expose all extreme positions and lofty poses, whether in politics, religion or in social life. No mask is safe from his gaze. He discourses pleasantly about the supreme indifference of God towards his creation and the eternal conflict of good and evil. Like Sajjad Ansari and Rashid Siddiqi he also seems to find the devil delightful company and Paradise a bore.

I would like to notice in passing a few lesser writers, who have extracted fun out of the stresses and strains of modern society and have on the whole played a healthy role, by making us aware that it is some of the contradictions of life that make it so delightful. Agami Beg Chughtai introduces us to the fun that is in family life and to the sheer joy of being young. He relies much on funny incidents and strange coincidences but it is good to note that in his short stories and novels the new woman who is glad to be a rebel comes on the scene and remains there. Shaukat Thanvi's *Svadeshi Rail* is a fantasy about our railways written before Independence, and it is amusing to note that life has indeed seemingly caught up with the artist here. His short sketches entitled *Sheesh Mahal* and most of his novels do not have great depth but amuse us by many happy turns of phrase and some skill at using the other end of the telescope.

Newspapers have thrown up some brilliant columnists. Some have been noticed earlier, but Salik and Hasrat deserve mention here. They were outstanding journalists with brilliant minds. It is curious to note that their occasional writings in newspaper columns will secure for them a niche in the writers corner, for in them they have been able to write prose that is pure magic and give twists to events and personalities that are sheer joy. Abul Kalam Azad has the zeal of a missionary in his *Al Hilal*, and his satire on the ways of the British and their Indian friends, has a devastating manner.

Progressive writing came in Urdu with a bang and its tall claims and its prophetic poses soon earned for it a good deal of ridicule. Satire has often been the weapon of the conservative, against the romantic and the rebel. But gradually the rebel was accepted and became part of a tradition. Krishna Chandra apart from his short stories dabbled in satire and humour and made fun of the old order. Manto with his clear vision could discern the grim humour which is akin to tears, in the tragedy of partition and plunder. He laughs away the iron in his soul and brings out the sordidness and savagery of that

harrowing period much more poignantly than many a sentimental and tearful account.

In *Chacha Chhakkan*, Taj borrows a good deal from the West. But Mushtaq Yousufi has reached great heights with his first book. He laughs at a book-seller who becomes bankrupt because he would sell only standard literature and offers his own judgment about authors, and remarks about Abstract Art that it is a puzzle set by a clever artist to know something of the sub-conscious of his admirers.

For a long time, humour in Urdu remained a weapon of political satire. As Huxley has noticed in his *Jesting Pilate* we Indians are obsessed with politics. It was natural before Independence, but even now there is so much injustice and inequality, so wide a gap between profession and practice, that the artist cannot help using satire to cure some of the ills of society. It is not that we have forgotten to laugh; we laugh easily, but it is not easy to laugh away the pettiness and the sordidness and the wilderness of hopes that we find around us. As long as politicians and preachers feed us on cheap romanticism and sermonize loudly and long, the writer will continue to use the dagger of satire to restore balance and a sense of realism.

Conditions are not quite favourable for the flowering of humour in India. There has been a coarsening of sensibility due to industrialization and the shock of shattered hopes. The new reading public fed on thrillers and films can see things only in black or white; the soft voice of humour is lost on it. It is either too seriously occupied with the business of living or too indifferent, after many a disappointed glance, to look again. For it is to this quality of looking again and looking deeper that humour owes its existence, and we have to wait for more favourable circumstances to witness its rise to greater heights. But perhaps we have not done too badly so far.



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